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"THE WEST GARDEN WAS ALWAYS HER SHADY REFUGE IN THE MORNINGS OF THE HOT JUNE DAYS."

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PREFACE

THREE of the following stories have appeared in magazines: "An Unshared Secret" in *Temple Bar*, "Rachel" in the *Universal Magazine*, and "The Little Brother-in-Charge" in the *Argosy*. They are now reprinted in book-form with the permission of the respective Editors of those magazines.



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5 AN UNSHARED SECRET



AN UNSHARED SECRET

CHAPTER I

"WHETHER character is formed by environment, or circumstances shaped and moulded by character, is a question often mooted. But one of the arguments, to my mind, against the first thesis, is the fact that brothers and sisters, brought up in precisely the same environment, and subject to the same training and influences, are more often than not entirely unlike——"

Thus far had Richard Temple, essayist, got in the sentence he was writing when there came a tap at his study door.

Annoyed at the interruption, he said, "Who's there?" rather impatiently, wondering

who could have the temerity to invade his sanctum when he was known to be writing against time.

His wife, he supposed. She was one of those wives who stood upon her rights, and considered she ought never to be shut out from her husband's society when she required it. But even she, he thought, could hardly have done it to-day.

"Not just now, Alice, please," he said, turning round on his revolving-chair, a look of great boredom on his face, and a slight frown on his brow. "Come again in twenty minutes, and I shall be more able to attend to you."

The door was pushed slowly but persistently open, and instead of the form of his wife, as he had expected, two small children entered. One his own, a dark-haired little girl of about six years old; and the other, a fair, fragile-looking boy, about a year older.

"You must not come in now, my little Geraldine," said Richard Temple, but his face had lost its bored look, and his voice was very gentle; "I am very busy, you know, to-day."

"Yes, daddy, I know," she answered earnestly, "and I told Dicky so; but he wanted very badly to come, cos he's got something he wants to ask you."

Richard Temple's tone was gentler still as he turned to the little boy with a smile and said—

"And what is it that Dicky wants to ask?"

The pretty boy came forward timidly.

"Oh, Uncle Richard," he said, "I've got a letter from mother, and I want you to read it to me. I can't quite read writing yet; not even hers, though she writes it as *text* as she can."

"Not even hers, Dicky!" repeated Richard Temple. "Give it to me, my little man. I will read it to you."

And he stretched out his hand for the letter.

There was nothing very particular in it. It was just one of those simple letters that loving young mothers write to absent little sons; but it seemed to move Richard Temple strangely. He held it in his hand for some minutes after he had finished reading it before he restored it to its owner, and then told the children to run away, as he must go on with his work.

But he did not resume his writing. He sat deep in thought, wrapped in such a reverie that he did not hear the door open again, and quite started when his wife laid her hand on his shoulder, and her voice sounded close to him.

"I am so sorry, dearest," she said, "that the children came and disturbed you. It was very naughty of them. I was horrified when I saw them coming out of your passage."

"It did not matter," he said; "they only stayed a minute."

"What did they want?"

"It was Dicky," he answered, "who wanted me to help him to read a letter he has had from—from home. And he does not seem quite able yet to make out handwriting, especially on foreign paper."

"Was it from his father?" she asked.

"No, from his mother."

"Oh, from Geraldine," she said; "then I don't wonder. Hers is a very difficult writing to read."

"You think so?" he said, with a slight note of interrogation in his voice.

"Very," she answered. "But Dicky ought to have brought it to me, instead of disturbing you. I wonder why he didn't."

"Well," said her husband, resuming his pen, "I must get on with my article now."

She leaned over his manuscript and read

the sentence he had written out aloud; a habit she had which particularly worried him.

The latter part of the sentence did not seem to please her. She laid her finger upon it.

"Do you think, then," she said quickly, "that Leonard and I are so very different?"

She was an unimaginative person, and like all unimaginative people she never generalized or realized that any one else could do so. People with little imagination always go back upon their own experience, and suppose other people must always be referring to theirs.

"Leonard and you?" he repeated vaguely and a little wearily. "Oh, I see; I had forgotten what I had written. Simply a generalizing remark. You must really let me go on now, Alice."

And she took the hint and went away.

This time there was no dreaming nor reverie.

He worked on steadily, and did not look up from his writing again.

* * * * *

The pretty boy who called Richard Temple "Uncle" was not his own nephew.

He was the child of his wife's only brother, Leonard Fox.

But Dicky's father was Richard Temple's oldest and dearest friend, and the boy was dear for his father's sake. This his wife knew, and admired her husband for his fidelity to his friend, her brother, for they had not met now for many years.

But that fair-haired boy was dearer still to Richard Temple for quite another reason, and of this reason his wife was profoundly ignorant.

For in the old days of their youth and their friendship, the two friends, all unknown to each other, had loved the same woman—Geraldine Eden.

Richard Temple hardly knew how deeply his own feelings were involved, till one day Leonard Fox took him into his confidence, and told him of his wishes and his hopes; and how all his future happiness depended on his winning the young girl for his wife.

Then Richard Temple knew.

They were sitting, the two friends, in the gloaming, and the room was rather dark, so that they could not see each other's faces.

There was a long, long silence when Leonard Fox ceased speaking, and in that silence Richard Temple could hear the quick beating of his own heart, and his own short breathing; so that he almost wondered his friend did not hear them too.

The stillness was broken at last by the voice of Richard, sounding hollow and forced, as though he were putting some strong strain upon himself.

Only two words did he say. They were these: "And she?"

There was a slight eagerness in his tone, held in check.

"I don't quite know, of course," was the answer, "but I have every hope. I shall give her time, and wait patiently. Wish me God-speed, my dear old friend!"

* * * * *

That was all that ever passed between the two on the subject, and was, indeed, the last time they met; for shortly after Richard left England and went to America, where he remained for some time.

And none but himself ever knew how, in those few moments, a bright dream of earthly joy had vanished for ever!

At the end of a few months he received an ecstatic letter from Leonard, announcing his engagement to Geraldine Eden, and telling him he must hurry home at once and act best

man to him at his wedding, which was to take place almost immediately.

But he did not go. He could not, he knew, efface himself so completely yet as to stand by his friend's side and see him united to the one woman in the world he had ever loved, and knew he should always love with that strong deep love of his which would know no change.

So he wrote saying that he was now too busily engaged, collecting material for a series of articles he was writing on America, to afford the time and the interruption which a voyage home and back again would entail.

Leonard Fox was much hurt at his friend's defalcation, and wrote reproachfully, saying he considered his excuse wholly inadequate.

So the marriage took place without him; and since that day the paths in life of the two friends had lain apart.

Shortly after his marriage Leonard Fox got

an important diplomatic appointment, and he and his wife settled abroad.

When Richard Temple found they had really gone for good, he returned from his travels, and settled down to a literary life.

It was a very absorbing one; his work was congenial and engrossing, and in it he buried himself and his past.

He began to climb the ladder of success, and his name to become known as a brilliant essayist.

His terse, concise style, his crisp, telling sentences, found many admirers; and he was the delight of a large circle of readers, though some found him too caustic for their taste.

He charmed the intellect, but never touched the heart.

The popular essayist was considered a man with a good hard head of his own, and a clear brain, but was not credited with much feeling.

For there was a hard tone about his polished epigrammatic writing. His underlying thoughts were pessimistic and cynical. They were those of a man out of conceit with life and with human nature; embittered and disillusioned.

Some readers were distressed by it, some depressed.

They would put down his essays with a sigh, feeling less hopeful about life and their fellow-creatures than they had done when they took them up.

* * * * *

Time passed on, and he married his friend's sister, Alice Fox. Everything pointed to the step as a most suitable one for him to take.

She was left homeless and friendless by the successive deaths of her father and mother at short intervals, and the permanent absence abroad of her brother.

He knew he should never really love any

woman again; but he had, or thought he had, a sort of affection for his friend's sister. He had known her since her early girlhood, and they had always been on terms of intimacy and easy friendship.

On his side, that is—on hers, the feeling was, and always had been, very different indeed. This he knew. In short, she had made it very plain to him; and he was well aware that in asking her to be his wife he was making one person in the world, at least, very, very happy.

Why should he not do it?

But he was a truthful man; and he would not marry her on false pretences. He would pretend to her no more than he felt.

So he frankly told her that his heart was dead and buried in the past, though he mentioned no names. He would do his best, he told her, to make her happy, and to be a kind and indulgent husband to her. If she

liked to take him on these terms, he thought they might be very happy together——

Yes! She would take him on these or any other terms!

He had always been, and still was, the romance of her life; such romance, that is, as her nature was capable of.

Alice Fox fulfilled the dream of her girlhood when she became Alice Temple; and made at the same time the fatal mistake of marrying a man who had plainly told her he did not love her.

She found him, as he had promised to be, the kindest, the most indulgent of husbands, ready and willing to please her, and to let her do anything she wished.

And at first she was fully satisfied.

But as time went on she felt she wanted something more.

She had not sufficient depth to realize that she had not got the best of him; that there

was something in him at which she never got; but she did realize very fully that she had very little of his companionship.

He was a very busy and a very successful man. And this meant his becoming more and more occupied in his work. In this she could have no share. She was neither an intellectual nor a literary woman. She could be of no assistance to him in any way; and she begrudged the absorption which his writing entailed, and which took him so much away from her.

Not away from the house, for all his work was done at home. But the study door was closed, as far as companionship went, during many hours of the day and evening.

She enjoyed immensely the notoriety and applause which his books gained for him when once they were out. She gloried in hearing them praised, in seeing them reviewed, but the actual isolation which the writing of them

entailed, she rebelled against with all her heart.

She would take her needle-work into his study, in the early days of their marriage, and sit there while he wrote; but though this established a right of entrance, it was eminently unsatisfactory to be there, listening to the scratch of his pen or following his movements as he every now and then rose to get a book of reference down from the shelves of his book-case, giving her a kind nod or smile, and then returning to his work again.

Besides, it made him so taciturn even when not engaged in writing; he was always thinking, and her little babble of conversation seemed sometimes hardly to reach his ears, at any rate did not succeed in gaining his interested attention.

No doubt her life was rather dull. He felt this himself; and rejoiced as much as she did,

when, at the end of a year or so, their little girl was born.

She would have her days filled up with an absorbing interest now, and he—would be left in peace!

"What shall we call our little daughter, Richard?" she said, when the child was a few days old.

She was gazing earnestly and scrutinizingly as she spoke at the tiny face of the infant, trying to discern in its tiny lineaments the one likeness she desired to see.

"Anything you like, my dear," he answered. "I have no particular fancy about girls' names. If it had been a boy——"

"Would you rather she had been a boy?" she interrupted quickly and rather anxiously.

"Not at all," he replied; "I was only going to say that, had it been a boy, I should have wished to call it Leonard."

"After my brother?" she said. And she

looked pleased. "Dear Richard! What a faithful friend you are!"

"But as it is a girl," he resumed after a moment, "I think you had better choose the name. What would *you* like her to be called?" he added, with a kind but rather preoccupied smile.

"I would much rather you chose the name," she said; "I should like the name much better if I thought you had chosen it."

And she waited to see what he would say; for what she really hoped was, that he would wish to call it after her.

"I can't think of any particular name," he answered. His thoughts were wandering to his unfinished essay downstairs.

She was disappointed; but as she always wanted to please him, and do exactly what he liked, she controlled herself, and only said—

"Leonard will be godfather, anyhow, of course; so as we can't call her after him,

would not the best thing be to call her after Leonard's wife?"

His attention was not wandering now.

"And Geraldine is a pretty name; don't you think so?" she added.

"Geraldine?" he said, and his voice slightly softened as he spoke the word. "Yes, a pretty name. If you like it, so let it be."

"Then that is settled," she said. "Little Geraldine!" she went on, addressing the baby. "Geraldine Temple! How well it sounds, doesn't it?"

"Very," he answered, and he rose up rather suddenly from his chair. "I think, my dear, you have talked long enough, and had better be quiet for a while and try to go to sleep."

But he stooped and kissed the infant for the first time as he left the room.

He went back into his study, but did not

resume his work. He sat gazing out of the window with eyes which did not see; for the conversation which had just taken place had stirred up memories of the past, which he generally forced away; and it was standing out once more clearly, too clearly, before him.

He was sitting again in the gloaming, and the sound of his friend's voice as he told his story was falling like a knell upon his ear.

Following quick upon that was the recollection of coming across a scrap of paper in his blotting-book that night, on which, just before that conversation, he had scribbled, "Geraldine Temple," "Geraldine Temple," over and over again.

And he remembered how he had crushed the paper in his hand, and flung it into the fire, and watched every bit of it burn to tinder ere he left the room.

He buried his head in his hands as these memories came over him.

CHAPTER II

But with his little daughter's birth a new era dawned in the life of Richard Temple. Things never turn out exactly as we expect; often entirely contrary. And whereas he had imagined that the presence of a child in the house would be an interest and an occupation to his wife, he found that it was he himself rather than she who found it an absorbing interest and a well-spring of pleasure.

His steps often strayed to the nursery, lured there he hardly knew by what feeling; but it was over and above the first interest created in the baby by the mere fact of her name. With the dawn of her infant intelligence, a new interest came into his life. He

had never watched this curious phenomenon before. It was altogether a new study to him, as new as it was marvellous, and a perpetual surprise. Watching the little face daily from infancy, he followed all the gradual and subtle changes with curiosity and wonder; from the time when the unseeing eyes first began to have a conscious look in them, and smiles to flit over the hitherto unmeaning face, till there was a dawning recognition of him as a familiar object seen; and then as not only seen but welcomed. Then when the little arms were held out to him with eager, restless movements of hands and feet, and a cry of welcome greeted his ear as he entered the room, his visits to the nursery became one of the chief interests of his life.

The day by day progress and development was to him an infinite source of surprise and delight. From her babyhood the child took to her father, and showed a decided

preference for him over all other members of the household, her mother not excepted. She would burst into tears when he left the room, and the door closed behind him; clamour to be held up to the window to see his departing form, tap frantically against the panes till he looked up with a sign of recognition, and wave her little hand to him till he was out of sight.

Then, in due course, followed the prattling baby words, the pattering baby feet about the house; and from the day she first ran up to him alone, and called him "Daddy," Richard Temple was a happier man. The small creature held him in a spell; and as she grew and increased in the charm of childhood, his pleasure in her society grew and increased too.

And the child's mother, glad and proud to see how he loved their little girl, and what pleasure she gave him, was never jealous at her

power over him, so much greater though it was than her own.

Meanwhile, Richard himself, all unknown to her, was conscious of a new want in his wife. It had crossed his mind that Alice, in her new character, might perhaps become an object of greater interest to him than she had yet been; and he hoped it very sincerely. But, alas! Alice, in her maternal character, was a deep, though unexpressed, disappointment. She was fond of her baby in a way; but he did not see in her that passion of mother-love which to him was one of the most beautiful things in the world. Slowly he realized that it was not there; that Alice was not capable of it—not, that is, as he understood it. And, as the little girl advanced out of babyhood into childhood, it was even more marked. In all matters of health and physical well-being she was perfect as a mother. To rules about sleep, and exercise and fresh air and

food, most scrupulous attention was given; as also to seeing that her rules were rigidly carried out. In all this she was an excellent mother to the child, no doubt.

But he sometimes questioned, as he watched the two together, whether the actual society of the child was such a great pleasure to her, after all; not half so much, he suspected, as it was to himself. For *he* loved to have the little creature always about him, always near him; toddling after him in the garden as he thought over his next essay, or hand in hand with him as he strolled about. The sound of the prattling voice outside the door, and the pattering footsteps down the passage outside his sanctum, brought a pleasure into his life unknown and unconceived of hitherto, a something of poetry and brightness into his humdrum, prosaic existence. He would pause sometimes in the middle of his writing, his pen stayed in his hand, to listen to it, to listen *for*

it, in short; and it gave an uplifting sense to the day, a feeling of lightness and gaiety and sunshine.

She had so little respect for literature, she was so sure of herself and of her presence being welcome. She would thump with soft palms at the closed door, calling, "Dada! dada!" softly outside, having escaped from her nurse. Then, before perhaps he had time to get up and open the door, the little creature would be pursued, and rush away laughing and screaming with delight at the excitement of the chase. And he would listen to the receding footsteps and the scuffle and the awe-struck "Hush" of the nurse, and her "What would mamma say? Papa's busy, you know!" with regret.

He would resume his work with a sigh, wishing inwardly that the nurse had not captured the truant quite so soon. For Mrs. Temple's orders were very strict that Baby

was never to be allowed to run down the passage or go near the room when the green baize door was closed. But Baby cared nothing for closed doors, and discarded all strict orders; and he was inwardly glad that it was so. Or she would come round to the study window which looked out on the quiet little west garden, where the sundial was; a garden where no gardener, no mowing-machine, was ever allowed to come when the study was occupied, and where silence reigned, but for the song of the birds or the chirp of the grasshopper in the grass. But perhaps for these very reasons she loved the west garden better than any other part of the grounds. The top of her sunny head, with the hat hanging off, would appear at the study window, and a hand held up above the head with a nosegay in it. And "For 'ou, dada!" were words which always brought him to the window, however busy he might be.

Indeed, Alice's constant fuss about his being disturbed, and her everlasting "papa's busy" to the child rather irritated him. "Little Geraldine *never* disturbs me," he said one day; "don't make me a bugbear to the child." And Alice, you may be sure, repeated this to her friends and neighbours, glowing with pride at his being so devoted a father.

Far, indeed, from disturbing him, the child's society was an absorbing interest. The gradually developing little intellect, the revolving of the busy brain, the day by day progress in understanding, was a most interesting study to him. The inconsequent remarks, couched in the pretty baby language, often interested him far more than his own literary thoughts. The freshness of her ideas, the vividness of her imagination, charmed and delighted him. The tiny outlook upon life, from her own little point of view, was to him so attractive; as was also the directness of the little mind, so

untrammelled by complexity, so unswayed to this side or that, by secondary motives. He was struck, not by the shallowness, but by the depth of the childish judgments and opinions, deep because they were so unbiased and so entirely truthful.

By the time she was four he was filled with astonishment at the quantities of information a child's mind gathers to itself in the short space of four years; the amount it has taken in and is able to reproduce. She was able now, he remarked with surprise, to enter into conversation with him—to moralize, as it were, with him over things—sitting on his knee, looking up into his face with earnest eyes, asking him the quaintest and often the most puzzling questions on subjects which seemed to him far above her.

Not that she was, as we said before, a grave, thoughtful child. Far from it. There was nothing about her of the "lonely only child;" the old-fashioned reflective little girl

long vista of bright
summer day of pro
coming delights; each
way to a new one, ev
hopes than the day befo

Little Geraldine neve
ran; and how he loved
about in the open ai
puppy or chasing the
catching the sunshine a
tangled mass of hair anc
resisted all her mother'
her the quiet, prim little g
her. And her father aid

and disciplined and bothered, and made into a commonplace and everyday one. To him she was perfect, he said, and any change would be for the worse.

And Alice gave way to him in this as she did in everything. She was, and always would be, more wife than mother, and the little daughter was always secondary in her eyes. "My husband spoils the child so dreadfully," she would say to her friends, "that I am obliged to be strict with her myself, or she would be ruined. He lets her break all my rules, and never contradicts her in any way. It is very bad for her. And so, too, is the exclusive attention he gives her whenever she is with him. Now, *I* think children ought to learn to amuse and occupy themselves. When she is with me alone I always give her a bit of needlework to do. I like her to sit sewing beside me, and I go on with my own occupations all the time."

Perhaps this was the reason little Geraldine found the drawing-room so dull unless her father was there! For she was not at all the sort of child to "sit sewing," and the time thus passed was abhorrent to her. She hated sitting still, and above all she hated sewing. Full, as we have said before, of life and spirits; always chattering, always laughing, she was an embodied bit of sunshine, and a veritable sunbeam in the home.

This had been to Richard Temple the charm of his friend Leonard Fox's companionship. Grave and taciturn himself, his friend's gay spirits and merry flow of conversation had first drawn him towards him. And now his own child, by a curious chain of circumstance, had inherited his friend's nature and charm. Her spirits were infectious. Her father never could withstand the sound of her clear, ringing laugh. She roused him out of himself. She was the music as she was the sunshine of his grey life.

Once she was very ill with measles. And then all the dormant tenderness of the man revealed itself. Anything about illness or weakness always woke it up. He tended her himself day and night. He was a born nurse; gentle, calm, and understanding. His tenderness went out at once to anything ailing or helpless. His wife, always strong, bustling, and energetic, had never had experience of this side of his character, and the child's illness was the first occasion which gave her an inkling of it. But it gave *him* an idea of what his little daughter was to him; for the fear, the horrid fear which just crossed his mind, that he was in danger of losing her, had revealed to him what life without her would be. But little Geraldine recovered; and the only result of the illness was that he was more wrapped up in her than ever.

As she grew older he educated her in his leisure hours in his own way, and on lines of

his own choosing; leaving the ordinary part of education to Alice, who did it very well, though in a thoroughly conventional manner. *His* teaching was altogether different. Little Geraldine learnt from him the notes of all the birds, the names of all the wild flowers, the difference in the leaves of all the trees. He taught her to love nature; the sky and the drifting clouds, the woods and the trees, and the blue hills in the distance; the gorgeous beauty of the sunsets, and the glories of the starlit sky. Hand in hand they would watch the sunset together; or, standing in her little white night-gown at the nursery window, with his arms round her, she would gaze upward with childish wonder at the starry heavens above. He wanted the world to be to her a place of wonder and mystery. He believed in imagination and idealization; and he sought to awaken in her little mind the "vague yet intense consciousness of the mystery which

lies behind Nature, the 'something beyond' and the 'something behind' which she could neither see nor know." He wished her to believe in mystery everywhere; and so he did not always seek to find clear and definite answers to all her eager questions. He thought it a mistake in dealing with children that exhaustive answers should always follow their inquiries. His idea was that it left no room for faith; and he wished to encourage the spirit of reverence and humility so sadly lacking in the youth of the present day. He did not wish to see the modern spirit in a little child.

So he would sometimes dismiss her questions with a "Some day, darling, you will be able to perhaps understand better; but you are too little yet," and pay no heed to her emphatic, "Oh but, daddy, I know I should understand, if you will *only* explain it to me!" That, he thought, was

all very well for "Magnall's Questions" or "Child's Guide to Knowledge," books on which Alice fed her little daughter's mind. But *he* wished the child to know, and to know early, that there are things which "pass man's understanding," and questions to which no answers can be found.

* * * * *

And so his life flowed on. He was content—or thought he was. He had his work; the refuge of an all-engrossing and absorbing occupation; growing fame as an author; and—his little daughter.

But it came to pass one day that a letter arrived at the house which was the means of dropping a troubling and disturbing stone into the quiet, stagnant waters of his existence.

CHAPTER III

THE letter was from Leonard Fox to his sister. It stated that the climate of the last place to which he had been appointed disagreed so seriously with his little boy that the doctors said he must be sent away at once, or they would not answer for the consequences. Would Alice and Richard take charge of him for the present? He was not strong enough, and indeed hardly old enough, to be sent to school just yet.

Alice brought this letter to her husband's study late one afternoon, and they talked the matter over.

There could be but one answer to such a request, and a telegram was written to that

effect, asking also to be told the probable date of the child's arrival, in order that he might be met at Southampton.

Alice was overcome at her husband's kindness.

It was all very well for her, she said, to be willing to undertake the charge of her own brother's child. But it was not at all the same thing to him, and men were not generally so complaisant in these matters in the case of their wives' relations.

"How can I ever thank you enough, dearest?" she said, laying her hand gratefully on his shoulder. "It is not every husband who would do as much for his wife's nephew, or even," she added, with a smile, "for a friend's child, when that friend has been unseen for so many years."

And then she went away to despatch the telegram, and Richard was left alone.

He had controlled himself in his wife's

presence, but his face assumed a different expression when she had left the room. For since the day when the question of his little daughter's name had brought the past vividly before him, nothing had so disturbed him as the arrival of that letter and the request it contained.

Geraldine's life all this time had been, and he had wished it to be, a sealed book to him. He had at first felt that therein lay his own safety.

His friend was a bad letter-writer, and Richard had taken advantage of this, and allowed the correspondence between them to drop almost altogether.

The sisters-in-law were almost strangers. They had met first at the time of the wedding, and had seen nothing of each other since. A letter every now and then passed between Leonard Fox and his sister, but in these there were few details. Moreover, Richard never asked to see them.

So that it had been easy hitherto to carry out his wish.

But how would that be possible in future? *Why* was this child to be sent right into his home like this, rousing all he had hoped was over and done with, raking up all that had lain still for so long?

He did not want to revive the past; he did not want to be disturbed again. He had reached with infinite toil and effort a sort of dead level of sombre content, and a semblance of happiness. He had his work and his little daughter. Why could he not have been left in peace with them?

Surely it was cruel of those happy two to inflict this upon him?

Ah! But he must remember that they did not know what they were doing. They could not guess in the most distant way what they were inflicting upon him. How should they?

Neither she, nor he, nor any one else knew anything; no one ever had known, no one ever would know. What had been done had been done innocently; and he must not blame them. He must bear it as best he could.

But his heart was stirred to its depths when, a week or so later, he went down to Southampton, and amid a hundred child passengers on board the ship he picked out the boy at once.

No need to tell him which was Geraldine's child! He would have known him among a thousand.

"You are Dicky, I am sure," he said gently, as he laid his hand upon the fragile boy's shoulder. "Do you know who I am?"

And the child, looking up, said in Geraldine's voice, "Are you my Uncle Richard?"

He started for a moment, and then said

slowly, "Ah! well, yes. I suppose that is what I am."

And thus Geraldine's child had become an inmate of his home. This was the disturbing stone which had been dropped into the quiet waters of his existence.

For the boy was so exactly like her! He could not wear any look, grave, smiling, or thoughtful, that was not her living image.

The likeness in manner and ways was as strong as it was in voice, feature, and colouring. It was a perpetual fascination to him. His eyes were never off Dicky when he was in the room, nor out of it, for he could see him playing with Geraldine in the west garden outside the study window whenever he looked up from his writing, and he looked up very often now. He could hear the murmur of childish voices, and see the two wandering about together hand in hand, or

sitting on the grass by the sun-dial, the sun-bonnet and the straw hat touching as they read out of the same book or looked at pictures together. Geraldine Temple and Richard Fox—his child and *hers!*

The strange juxtaposition, the strange conjunction of names set his thoughts wandering with many and mingled feelings.

"An old-fashioned, unchildlike little creature," had been his wife's verdict on the boy, the day after his arrival. And who had a better right to give an opinion? Was he not her brother's son, her own nephew?

And yet Richard shrank at her words, felt she was treading on ground which was sacred, and on which she had no right to tread, and inwardly resented her remarks.

And, indeed, outwardly also, for he felt he could not bear it; he must put a stop to all such remarks at once and for ever.

She was forming her opinion very quickly,

he said; hasty judgments were superficial, and therefore very often unfair.

Alice looked at him in surprise for a moment, and then reflected with admiration, as she had often done before, on his faithful nature. Even at this distance of time he was so loyal to his old friendship that he did not like to hear her brother's child in any way disparaged.

"You have a feeling for this little fellow, dearest, I see," she said, "and I know it is for old sakes' sake! Now, am I not right?"

He started for a moment at her words, and then answered slowly and dreamily, "For old sakes' sake. Yes!"

"You are looking for a likeness, I am sure," she said, on another occasion, intercepting his prolonged, searching gaze.

She waited for an answer. It was necessary to give one.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I was."

"And you did not find it," she went on.

"No wonder, for the boy is the image of his mother, who, I think, you never saw. He is not a bit like Leonard, is he?"

"No," he answered, glad to be able to reply this time without a *double entente.*

"And you are disappointed, I know. His mother was very pretty," she added, sinking her voice so that the child should not overhear, "but not the sort of looks *I* admire."

"Indeed!" he said, with slightly raised eyebrows.

"No," proceeded Alice, "too die-away and sentimental-looking for me; and this boy has exactly the same expression. I never saw a more striking likeness between a mother and a child. He looks very sickly," she went on, "and seems to have no life or spirit, and that to my mind always militates against beauty. Nothing like the beauty of health and happiness. Now, just look at our bright, rosy little girl! How pale and depressed she makes this boy look!"



He made no answer. He wished she would not talk about her brother's wife—or child.

* * * * *

This brings us to the day when this story opens, and the reader will no longer be at a loss to understand why the reading of a simple little letter from a mother to her absent child should have had power to move Richard Temple so strangely, and to throw him, after the children were gone, into so profound a reverie; till, from that dreamy retrospect, he had been roused, as we saw, with a start, by his wife's hand on his shoulder, and been thereby brought suddenly back to the prosaic realities of his own present life.

It was well for him that the finishing of his essay was of paramount importance, for it formed an excuse for ridding himself of her presence, and it restored the balance of his mind by giving it its usual opium in the shape of absorbing occupation.



CHAPTER IV

THE essay came to an end, however, and the effects of the opium died away. But wheels on the gravel outside warned him that he had no time for reflection.

He was going up to London on business with his publisher, and this was the carriage coming to take him to the station.

He collected his papers together and hurried off.

Not till he was in the train, being borne swiftly along to his destination, had he time to realize that the reading of that letter had affected him even more than had the boy's presence in his house.

For it was the first time in all those years



that he had been put into any sort of personal communication with her; the veil had been lifted from the life shrouded and hidden from him hitherto, and the silence, the unbroken silence, of the years had been broken at last. To find himself the medium between Geraldine and her child had been a strange and bewildering sensation; and, as he had read aloud her very own words, the beloved and unforgotten voice had sounded in his ears again. Then, too, those tender, anxious words in which the letter was couched had gone to his heart. The passion of mother-love in them had moved him profoundly. He realized what the child had had and what the child had lost.

For of one thing he felt only too certain. That passion of mother-love to which he was so evidently accustomed, he would never find here! And could a child, accustomed to that kind of affection, possibly be happy without it?

A pang seized Richard as he thought of this.

He remembered now how his wife had said the child looked depressed, and it troubled him.

The tender questions in the mother's letter —"Are you happy, my darling? Try and be happy for my sake!"—rang in his ears, and brought with them a feeling of compunction and misgiving. Was he happy? Could he be happy in his new surroundings? And what had he himself done to make him so? Nothing! He had been selfishly full of his own feelings as inspired by the boy's presence, and had quite overlooked the boy himself.

This must be remedied. He would try in future to see more of the child, get at the little fellow, and discover for himself if he was happy or not.

This precious child of hers was a trust, a sacred trust, and for *her* sake he would do what in him lay to make him so. He blamed himself for not having done it sooner.

The little sign of confidence on the child's part in bringing his letter to him had touched him also; the trusting look in the blue eyes had appealed to him very strongly. Why, he asked himself, had he brought it to him? Why, as Alice herself had said, had he not taken it to her? It would have seemed more natural for him to have done so.

Could it be that the boy felt a want in her already?—missed in her that which Richard had always been so painfully conscious was lacking even in the case of her own child? How much more so then in the case of the child of another!

On the other hand, why had he brought it to him? He had taken so very little notice of him.

The arrival of the train at the terminus brought his reflections to an abrupt conclusion, and the questions went unanswered.

Yes! Why had the child sought Richard

Temple out? Shy, timid child that he was, what made him so bold as to break in, even against little Geraldine's warning, upon that sacred spot, the Study, when the green baize door was closed? Was it that, with a child's unerring instinct in these matters, though he had taken so little outward notice of him, he had detected a difference in Richard's manner to him from that of any one else in the house? Was Dicky conscious that his eyes grew softer when they rested on him, the tones of his voice gentler when addressed to him? Or was there a deeper and a more subtle reason?

It is Charles Dickens who tells us that no man ever really loved a woman, lost her, and knew her again with a blameless though an unchanged mind when she was a wife and mother; but her children have a strange sympathy with him, an instinctive delicacy of pity for him.

Was Dicky drawn by some such strange

instinctive sympathy to his uncle? Who shall say?

He had a busy day in London, and returned by a later train than he had intended, so that the children had already gone to bed when he reached home.

He went up to pay his usual visit to his little daughter, who was sitting up in bed eagerly looking out for him and for the quiet talk with which they always ended the day.

On leaving her he passed the room which Dicky occupied, and the door being ajar, he pushed it open and went it. The nurse was sitting at work by the window, and the child lay very quiet in his bed, apparently asleep. Mr. Temple made some excuse to the nurse and went to Dicky's bedside.

Longing to atone to him in some measure for all that he had had, and all that he had lost, and drawn to him by the tenderest

feelings of pity, he bent over him and lightly touched his forehead with his lips.

Dick stirred, and murmured, dreamily, "I shall see you again—in the morning."

"What does he say?" Richard asked of the nurse.

The nurse smiled, but the tears stood in her eyes.

"He is half dreaming, sir," she said, "and thinks you are his mother, saying good night to him. He has said that when she kissed him the last thing at night, almost ever since he has been able to speak. Mrs. Fox always put him to bed herself after hearing him say his prayers, and she used to say that to him when she kissed him the last thing. They were that wrapped up in each other, that I think they could hardly bear to part even for the night. I used to hear her saying over and over again sometimes, as she hung over his crib, 'Good night, good night, my

darling. I shall see you again in the morning. We shall meet again in the morning!' Then perhaps the child would beg her not to go, as children will. And she would answer, 'I must, my darling. Go to sleep quick. The night will soon pass, you know, and then will come the morning.' And to think," concluded the nurse, wiping a tear from her eye, "to think what miles of land and water lie between them now!"

Mr. Temple turned away rather abruptly, and left the room without making any rejoinder. Something in what the nurse had said touched him to the quick, and his eyes were dim as he thought of it. The little picture, conjured up by her words, had got hold of his imagination; and the more his thoughts dwelt upon it, the more all the details seemed to fill themselves in.

He saw in fancy the slight, graceful figure bending over the little bed; the bent head

crowned with the fair *crêpé* hair; he heard the soft voice he remembered so well.

He had never seen *his* child's mother hang over the little bed like that, murmuring such words of love and blessing, lingeringly leaving the little head upon the pillow, seeming as if she could hardly tear herself away, shrinking even from the separation of the coming night.

If he had, perhaps he could have loved her more.

Poor commonplace, unpoetical, uninteresting Alice! He turned his thoughts quickly away. "The night will soon pass, you know, my darling, and then will come the morning!" The words were still in his head when he went upstairs to dress for dinner.

It was a far cry from such thoughts as these to his wife's little babble of conversation at dinner, and she found him even more

taciturn than usual. But she rippled on, notwithstanding.

"I am sure, dearest Richard," she said at last, "you are meditating on some quite new subject."

He was, no doubt, but not on a subject for a new article, as she imagined. "I have often noticed," she went on, "that on the day you have finished any work on which you have been engaged some time, and taken it up to the publisher, you always seem very pre-occupied, and I put it down to some new idea possessing your mind. Now, am I not right? It seems to me so odd. I should have thought your mind would have been glad of a rest. Oh, by the way," she went on, without waiting for an answer, "I knew I had something to tell you. I had luncheon to-day at Hurst Park, and they had a lady staying with them, a Mrs. Loftus, who was wildly excited when she found I was your

wife! It seems she is an enormous admirer of yours, and simply devours everything you write as fast as it comes out. She asked me more questions about your writing than I could possibly answer! She wanted to know how you set about it, whether you made a skeleton first of your plan, and then filled in the details, whether you thought it out before you began, or whether it all came to you when you had got the pen in your hand. Did you talk it over with me while you were writing it? It must be so delightful, she said, to live always with a genius. And she *did* seem surprised when I said I knew very little about it all, and that you seldom mentioned the subject. She said she should not be so uninquisitive as I appeared to be, if *she* were the wife of an author. She should be always asking questions, and insisting on being answered. And oh! Richard, she *does* want so much to come and see you! She says she

wants to tell you herself how much she admires you; that you are 'the Hazlitt and the Arnold of the day, and that she would be proud to add a leaf to the crown of bays surely waiting you'—those were her very words. I said them over several times on my way home, so as to be sure of repeating them to you correctly."

"Alice," he broke in suddenly, "do you think that child is happy?"

"Happy!" she exclaimed, puzzled—"the child happy? What *do* you mean, Richard? Surely we have always agreed that a brighter, happier little girl does not exist in the three kingdoms!"

"I don't mean her," he answered; "I mean him."

"Him?" she said, still puzzled. Then, after a moment, "Oh, you mean Leonard's boy. Oh yes, I think he is happy enough, or, if he is not, he ought to be. But he is a

mopey, morbid little creature, I fancy. From what our nurse tells me, I gather he has been spoilt and fussed over, and made too much of at home. His mother hardly ever let him out of her sight, and fussed after him all day long. He has been made too much the first object, and will, I think, be all the better for a little 'wholesome neglect.' Anything so bad for a boy as to be tied to his mother's apron-strings like that I cannot imagine. Between ourselves, I think it is a good thing for them both that they have got the sea between them."

Richard got up rather suddenly from his chair and went to the sideboard, where he stood with his back turned, as if he had gone in search of something which was not on the table. He felt the conversation must be brought to an end. But Alice was quite unconscious.

"What did you want, Richard? Why give yourself all that trouble? Let me ring."

She rang the hand-bell at her side sharply as

she spoke, and the entry of the servant made a diversion. By the time he had reseated himself at the table there was no fear of the conversation being resumed. She had forgotten what they were talking about, so little did the subject interest her, and she eagerly reverted to what interested her a great deal more — *i.e.* the remarks of Mrs. Loftus and her fulsome compliments.

And he, meanwhile, was making a mental comparison between her careless and prosaic remark, "It is a good thing for both that they have got the sea between them," and the pathos of the nurse's tearful words, "To think what miles of land and water lie between them now!" For taking all the poetry out of life, and reducing everything to the commonplace, Alice had not her equal. He ought to have got accustomed to it by this time, but it jarred upon him more than usual to-night.

When he got back to his study that evening

he did not set to work at once. He threw open the windows, and stepped out into the night. It was a habit of his when he was disturbed in his thoughts and restless. Nature always soothed and quieted him, and to be alone, quite alone with her, was an unfailing recipe. He loved her in all her aspects, and she responded to all his moods. He wandered further and further from the house, and struck across the garden into the open country beyond. It was not a typical June night, for it was dark, and the wind was rising. There was rather a wild-looking sky. Dark clouds were scurrying along, and the moon was obscured. But it mattered not to him—dark or moonlit, stormy or peaceful, it was all one. He loved it all. He wandered on and on, oblivious of how the time was passing. It must have been over an hour before he bethought him of retracing his steps. As he neared home the moon broke out for a moment

from between the hurrying clouds, and all the beautiful country round him was bathed in light. He stood still for a while, drinking in the beauty of the moonlit scene, and listening to the soft sighing of the wind in the pine-trees near him.

The moon was once more hidden behind the clouds when he reached the house, and everything around him was in darkness. He re-entered the study by the window, shut the shutters, and resumed his work. His recipe had had its usual effect. He was soothed and quieted. Nature had sung to him, as to many before him, the "Rhymes of the Universe"—

> "And whenever the way seems lonely,
> And the heart begins to fail,
> She sings a yet more wonderful song,
> Or tells a more wonderful tale."

CHAPTER V

FEELING is not always translated into action; but Richard Temple was no sentimentalist, and he came down the next morning full of his new resolution. He had some work that must be done first, but as soon as that was got under a little, he intended to give himself up that day to making friends with Dicky.

He wrote away steadily for nearly an hour, and at the end of that time it suddenly occurred to him that there was a strange silence in the garden outside. He missed the sound of the childish voices to which he had already grown accustomed. The children seemed to be very quiet this morning. He wondered what they were about.

He got up from his writing and went to the window. The garden was empty. There was no sign of them anywhere; yet it was little Geraldine's hour for play, and the west garden was always her shady refuge in the morning of the hot June days. Where could the children be? He left his essay, put on his hat, and went in search of them. As he passed under the nursery window he saw Geraldine's nurse sitting at work, and called to her, asking why the children were not in the west garden.

"It was by Mrs. Temple's orders," was the reply; "she had said the children were not to play there in the morning. She thought they would disturb him."

"But surely Miss Geraldine has always been allowed to play there," he urged, with a frown on his face.

"Mrs. Temple had said two children were very different to one, and she had given

her orders that in future they were neither to play in the west garden nor go near the green baize door. She had met them herself coming down the passage yesterday, and had been much displeased. She said it must not happen again."

"I will speak to Mrs. Temple about it," he said; and he turned back into the house to find his wife.

It was a very unusual hour for him to seek her presence, and he had some difficulty in finding her. She was not in the drawing-room, nor in her bedroom. In answer to his inquiries, a maid informed him that, at this time in the morning, Mrs. Temple would be either in the linen-closet or the store-room, and he finally ran her to ground in the latter apartment, putting out the stores—weighing sugar and candles, and too busy to pay even him any attention for a few minutes.

However, the appearance of so unexpected a visitor at such an unwonted hour caused her to hurry over her occupation, and to shorten the reproof she was administering to the housemaid as to the number of candles burnt lately.

They were, she was saying, greatly in excess of what was necessary in view of these being the longest days of the year, and she appealed to her husband to corroborate her assertion. As, however, nothing was to be seen but his vanishing form in the act of disappearing from the room, she cut short her lecture, and hastily followed him into the study. In answer to his objections to her new rules, she said she had imagined that the noise made by two children would be very different from that made by one alone, and that the chatter of their voices outside the window would certainly disturb him. Besides, they left the garden and went down

his passage yesterday, and into his room, and this sort of thing could not be allowed. However, of course everything should be as he liked, and she would go back at once and reverse her orders, and have the children sent back into the garden.

But, unfortunately, she did not go at once.

Her eye was attracted by his manuscripts scattered all over the table, for he had got up from his writing in the middle of his work—a thing which did not often happen—and the freshly written sheets strewed about in every direction were too much for her curiosity. She took up first one and then the other, reading little bits out loud, making remarks, and asking questions.

He bore it patiently for a few moments, and then he felt he could bear it no longer. He gathered up his papers, and began to rearrange them.

"I have something to finish in a given time, Alice," he said, "and I have wasted some precious moments already this morning, so I really must not waste any more."

"It is a never-ending marvel to me," she said, as she reluctantly prepared to leave the room, "how you think of so many different subjects to write upon. No sooner have you finished one essay than you start another. A fresh subject seems to come to you at once. Now, *I* might think for days and days, and not a single new idea would come into my head!"

Which was no doubt true.

The door closed behind her, and with a sigh of relief he resumed his writing.

In a very little while the soothing murmur of children's voices and the sound of his little daughter's ringing laugh fell upon his ear.

His wife, then, had lost no time in obeying

his behests. He got up and went to the window, where he stood for some minutes watching them at their play.

Little Geraldine took the lead entirely, he observed, though she was a year or so younger. Dicky did not seem to have the energy to assert his own wishes in any way. He left it all to her. He was languid and listless. Indeed, it seemed to Richard as he watched them that she was almost too much for him, and that he was physically incapable of doing all she required him to do, or of following her eager, active movements. He looked rather worn and tired, Richard thought. The child's delicacy touched him. He was always—unlike his wife—drawn to anything weak or ailing; and he was sorry for the fragile child, who had neither the health nor the power of enjoyment possessed in such full measure by his own little daughter. After all, he reflected, the boy was only just recovering from the

effects of a bad climate. Was he being sufficiently treated as an invalid?

Dicky's nurse happening at this moment to come into the garden with some milk for Dicky, he called her to the window, and asked a few questions.

Was the boy's health pretty good now? Had he got over the effects of the climate at all?

"He was better," the nurse answered; "the sea voyage had done wonders for him; but he was not a strong child—never had been from his birth."

"Was he happy here?" was the next question. "He seemed very grave and quiet."

The nurse hesitated. "He was very home-sick," she said. "He had never been away from his mother before, even for a day, and he missed her sadly—missed her every moment. It was not to be wondered at, as Mrs. Fox had always made such a companion of him,

and had him so constantly with her. He was a very sensitive, affectionate child, and she thought the wrench had been almost too much for him. No doubt he would get over it in time; but at present he was still feeling it very much. The society of his little cousin," the nurse added, "was the very best thing for him. The little girl seemed so bright and gay, and children understood each other. There was, she thought, a sort of freemasonry between them."

"Let them be together, then, as much as possible," said Mr. Temple; and he turned from the window and resumed his work.

But his heart went out to the loving, home-sick child, with his daily longings for that face, that voice, that presence far away. Had he not known them too?

"Daddy," said a gay voice at the window, "here are some raspberries for you."

He turned at the sound of the voice, and

his pen went down, for the innocent face peeping in at the window was quite irresistible to him.

How fresh and cool she looked, in her white frock and muslin hat, holding in both hands, in a fresh green cabbage-leaf, the rich ripe fruit she had gathered for him. His eye rested lovingly on the pretty picture framed in the old oak window. She seemed to embody in herself the beauty of the June morning.

He kissed the bright, eager face as he took the fruit from her hand.

"Thank you, my darling. How nice they look! What beauties!"

"I'm dreadfully afraid you may find one or even two maggots in them," she said, earnestly and anxiously, as she watched him eating the raspberries; "but I don't think you'll find many."

"What have you done with Dicky?" he

said, his quick glance discovering that the second little figure of which his eye was in search was not at her side.

"He's waiting for me out there in the shade," she answered, "and then we're going to my garden to do some gardening. Won't you come too, daddy? You don't seem a bit busy this morning."

"Ah, but I am, my darling—very busy. What makes you think I am not?"

"Well, daddy, I saw'd you twice out in the garden, walking about."

"Oh no, dear; I was only out once, I think."

"But I *saw'd* you, daddy! Once you was talking to Nana up at the nursery window; and another time you was talking to Dicky's nurse at the study window; and then you walked out at the hall door and in at the drawing-room window. So you can't be so very busy to-day, *can* you? And you might

come out just once more and help me to garden. *Do!*"

"Well, run away now, my little girl, and I will try and come out in about ten minutes or so for a little while."

Geraldine closed with this bargain, and ran off to join Dicky. And as her father watched the active little figure disappear, he realized how very difficult it was to do anything at all out of the usual routine when exposed to such close and microscopic observation!

When he joined the children a quarter of an hour after, little Geraldine was digging in her garden literally with all her heart and soul and strength. The mould dislodged by her vigorous spade was flying in all directions round her from the violence of her digging. She looked so energetic, so keen, and so full of vitality, that she seemed to bring out in sharper contrast than ever the languor and listlessness of Dicky, who stood by looking on.

"Dicky doesn't help me much, daddy," she called out as her father drew near.

The little boy looked up shyly and wistfully.

"Perhaps Dicky's tired," said Richard, looking kindly at the little fellow.

"He's always tired," said Geraldine in rather a discontented voice. "*Why* is he?"

"Dicky has been ill, you know," said her father rather gravely, and with a touch of something rather reproving in his manner, to which his little daughter was wholly unaccustomed. He thought he detected in her a reflection of the tone about Dicky which had already annoyed him in his wife; and he was sorry to see it, and wanted to put a stop to it.

"Just fancy, daddy," the little girl went on, without paying any attention to his remark, "Dicky has never even *heard* of 'Love-lies-bleeding' nor 'Love-in-a-mist! No, nor yet

'Lords-and-Ladies' neither! *He* doesn't know much about flowers, does he?"

Richard felt sorry for the little boy, who shot a swift, anxious glance at him, as if to see what effect the report of such appalling ignorance would have.

He patted Dicky kindly on the shoulder while he said—"In the hot countries Dicky is used to, our old-fashioned English flowers do not grow. But I dare say, all the same, he knows more flowers than we do—some that neither you nor I have ever seen, or even heard of."

"Why, daddy?"

"Because," answered her father, "he comes from a land—

> "'Where the flower of the orange blows,
> And the fireflies glance through the myrtle boughs.'"

He stopped, for he met Dicky's eyes with a bright look of intelligence in them. "You know those verses, Dicky?" he said, turning to him.

"Yes," said the little boy, shyly.

"How do they go on? I have forgotten."

And Dicky took up the lines from where his uncle had left off; and as he repeated them, slowly and distinctly, with unusual taste and feeling for a child, Richard kept his eyes upon him, fascinated.

> "'Where the feathery palm-trees rise,
> And the date grows ripe under sunny skies,
> Or midst the green islands of glittering seas
> Where fragrant forests perfume the breeze,
> And strange bright birds with their starry wings
> Bear the rich hues of all glorious things.'"

But the fascination seemed to be largely fraught with some other feeling; for he held up his hand to stop him, and his face had a strained look.

"That will do, my little man," he said, in a low voice, and then, with an effort, he turned to his little daughter, as if to shake off some painful thoughts. "Ah, my little girl," he said, "I fancy you will find Dicky has learnt many things you know nothing of, even if he

has never heard of 'Love-lies-bleeding' or 'Love-in-a-mist.'"

But Geraldine was no longer listening to the conversation. The subject had strayed into paths that did not interest her. She did not care for "po-try;" and she was digging away as violently as ever, with the mould flying around her.

Richard gave himself a holiday from his writing that afternoon, and took the two children a long ramble, gathering wild flowers.

It was that beautiful time in June when the hedges are covered with the briar rose and honeysuckle, and the wild strawberries grow all over the banks.

They had a long, happy time in the lanes and the woods; and in the cool of the evening he sat with them in the hay-fields, while they played with the new-mown hay.

He was touched once or twice during the walk by feeling Dicky's trustful little hand

slipped into his as they went along. He was still further touched when bed-time came, and little Geraldine, in saying good night to her father, added, as was her nightly habit, "Mind, daddy, you come up and see me in bed—don't forget!" to see a wistful look in Dicky's eyes, and to hear him shyly whisper, with a covert glance at his aunt, "Come and see me too."

CHAPTER VI

He devoted himself to the children for the next few afternoons, and at the end of that time Dicky had very much lost his shyness and reserve. But at luncheon, in the presence of his aunt, he was very shy and silent. She certainly did very little to draw him out. Her chief remarks to him were injunctions to "sit square," or concerning the way he held, or did not hold, his knife and fork. Moreover, his fastidious and capricious appetite displeased her. She felt sure he had been pampered and indulged in this respect at home, and she set to work to cure him; to teach him to eat fat and underdone meat, or anything else she saw he particularly disliked.

Then also his listlessness annoyed her. She would have it that he was lazy, an unpardonable fault in her eyes! and she did not perceive, or would not allow, that his languor arose from his delicacy. So she gave him a "job" whenever she met him. He had all the runs and all the messages which little Geraldine delighted in doing, and would so gladly have done for him; and the consequence was that the little boy was sometimes quite tired out. The result of all this was that he avoided his aunt and kept out of her way as much as possible. He was no more inclined either than his little cousin, though for quite different reasons, to be set down to some employment he did not care for; and his aunt insisted he should learn both knitting and netting. The moment he appeared in the drawing-room she rushed at him with these employments, for one of her pet theories was that children should never be unoccupied for a moment; and another, that

it was a great mistake to suppose that boys were never to learn any kind of needlework. Dicky was a victim to both these theories.

There was an hour in summer in the heat of the day much dreaded by little Geraldine. It was that which immediately followed luncheon, when her mother decreed it was too hot for her to be out, and she had to come into the drawing-room and "sit quiet with her work." In this hour Dicky had to join, and a dull one the little pair found it, he struggling with meshes and yards of entangled string, and she "sitting sewing," with deep-drawn sighs of boredom, every now and then casting longing looks at the lawn outside the window, and giving vent to sundry rebellious remarks to the effect that she was sure it was "much more cooler" and "much more shadier" out-of-doors under the trees than it was in the drawing-room, which was "so much hotter and

stuffier" that she could hardly breathe in it, that she wasn't allowed "a puff of air, not one little puff," etc., etc., while Alice pursued her own avocations, regardless of their presence.

Dicky was never at his best in his aunt's society. He seemed to shrink into himself when she was present. Nor was it much to be wondered at. She never talked to him, or encouraged him to talk to her. She made no effort to draw him out; indeed, she did not know how. She had no real sympathy with children. Their society gave her no pleasure. But he opened out more and more when alone with his uncle. He would sit by his side talking while the more active little Geraldine pursued her games without him, for he was soon tired; and, indeed, he seemed to prefer his uncle's society to that of his cousin. He was no doubt more at home with his elders than with those of his own age.

Richard himself was quite surprised to find how companionable the boy was. Hitherto he had thought his little daughter a wonderful companion for her age; but this was altogether a different thing. *She* was a thorough child, and a very restless one. He never could depend upon any continuance of a conversation with her. For though sometimes she would sit talking quietly with him, her little mind answering back to his, the next minute she was off with the puppy, or was seized with a sudden wish to climb the trees in the garden, and ere he had realized she was gone from his side her little figure would be lost in the green boughs above. But this boy would sit still for any length of time, talking or listening to reading; and he was quite capable of a sustained conversation. His little mind was above his years; he was both thoughtful and intelligent, and he had a vein of poetry in his

nature which in Geraldine was altogether lacking.

But it was not only this. Young as he was, the boy showed signs of having been accustomed to the companionship of a refined and cultivated mind; and Richard detected in him a sort of faint reflection of that mind, as remarkable as the likeness in feature and expression. He became more and more fascinated with the boy's society; spent more and more of his leisure time with him, read to him, talked to him, drew him out, and in so doing found a fresh interest and pleasure in his daily life. And, as the days went by, a new feeling rose in his breast. The wish to hear nothing and know nothing of Geraldine's life passed away, and gave way to a desire, which was almost a longing, to hear her spoken of; to have some light, however faint, thrown on her history, and to know what her life had been all these years since

he had seen her, which sometimes seemed a lifetime, and sometimes but as yesterday.

He would have liked to have questioned the boy about his mother and his home, but little Geraldine was always present, and every conversation was subject to her interruption.

"Dicky," he exclaimed one evening, when the little girl was disporting herself upon a haycock, and the boy, tired out, was half-sitting, half-lying on the hay by his uncle's side, under the shadow of the hedge, "talk to me about your mother. Tell me something, *anything* about her."

"About mother!" said the little boy, a glow coming into his pale cheeks at the very mention of her name. "Oh yes, I would like to."

"Daddy! daddy!" broke in the eager voice of little Geraldine, as she plumped herself down between them, "I've found the most *benormous* caterpiller. Such a cur'ous one. Do

just look!" And she opened her hand and displayed her treasure.

Richard had never been so near feeling impatient with his little daughter as he did at that moment. It was impossible to resume the conversation, and the opportunity was lost.

No; there was no difficulty in making friends with Dicky. The difficulty came from quite another quarter. Little Geraldine was accustomed to her father's sole and undivided attention, and had all the tenacious and monopolizing tendencies of a beloved only child. She did not understand the change. Dicky himself, after the first novelty of having a companion of her own age had worn off, did not suit her. His tastes were far too quiet, and he had none of her "go" and energy. When she wanted to make him climb trees he turned giddy and had to come down. He could not toss hay with a pitchfork long without getting tired; and when she wanted

to build a fire in the woods he was not able to drag the faggots quick enough to suit her impetuosity. He added to these defects too great a love for the sort of books she did not care for. And now, when she wanted "her daddy" to do something for her, he was reading or talking to Dicky, and did not always display that alacrity to attend to her behests to which she had been used all her little life.

As the days went by, a change, a subtle, undefined change, seemed to have come over everything; something had crept into her home for which she could not account. She felt it, without of course being able to define it. She grew restless, fretful, a little discontented; and her temper was not so sunny and sweet as it was wont to be. The serpent had entered her Eden, and she knew not whence it came. Her mother thought the child was not well. The heat, she thought, affected her, and she over-tired herself in the hayfields, and was too

much on her legs. She gave her cooling medicines, and made her lie down in the afternoon as well as in the morning, to the child's infinite disgust and no small rebellion.

Then at last one day her feeling of unrest spent itself upon Dicky, and her father was more displeased with her than she ever in all her life remembered his being before; and her storm of sobs at the unwonted sternness of his tone roused the whole household, whose idol she was.

It came about like this. Dicky had been unable to comply with her request in some trifling work of energy owing entirely to his natural weakness. Her cup of discontent had flowed over, and she had spoken impatiently and contemptuously. "You're a poor, weak thing!" she had exclaimed with all the scorn she could put into her small voice; and Dicky, sensitive and distressed, had hidden himself away, and been found crying by his

nurse, to the latter's great and lasting indignation. There was consternation in the establishment, for the weeping children had each of course their separate and staunch supporter and champion; and the double nursery got divided into two camps, as double households will. Then too, Alice, surprised at her husband's unwonted sternness to his little daughter, questioned him on the subject, and, on hearing its cause, remarked dryly that he would allow that she was justified now in what she had always said; she had always told him that he spoilt the little girl dreadfully, gave her too exclusive attention, and never denied her anything or checked her in any way. The result was, that because she had to share his attention with another child, she was put out. It was a case of "I told you so!" which is always a satisfaction to the person who "told."

But at the same time, and with a little more

heat than she usually showed when speaking to her husband, Alice went on to say that she did not wonder the little girl was rather jealous of the interloper to whom her father gave such attention as almost to amount to preference. It was very kind of him, of course, and she knew it was for "old sakes' sake," and it was all the kinder because Dicky could not possibly recall Leonard to him in any way, a poor little mopey muff of a boy, as unlike her brother as he could possibly be, and who she could hardly imagine to be his son. But it was a little hard upon other people. Though Dicky *was* "his old friend's child and her nephew, she thought people's own belongings should come first!"

There was a covert meaning in this last sentence; she was not altogether thinking of little Geraldine. For she had asked Richard the day before to come out driving with her, and he had refused on the plea of having an

essay to finish. Returning from her drive earlier than she had meant, she had found him in his study certainly, but reading a story-book to Dicky, who was lying on the sofa.

Richard made no reply. His anger was stirred at her calling Dicky a muff; but he controlled himself and said nothing. He felt he was treading on dangerous ground, and that the atmosphere was charged with electricity. Things seemed to have come to an *impasse* that day. Were wife, child, and household going to conspire to make poor little Dicky a "bone of contention" in the house?

He sighed wearily as he returned to his study.



CHAPTER VII

FORTUNATELY for all parties, the following day had been fixed upon by Alice for taking Geraldine up to London for a day's shopping, to get her her "spring clothes." This day, which came round with Alice as regularly as did the "spring clean" in her house, was a day which the child hated with all her heart.

Hats and boots had to be tried on; she was measured and fitted for coats, etc., everything, in short, which to an impatient child was most abhorrent. But it had to be done, and this little Geraldine knew.

Her father always tried to gild the bitter pill for her as much as he could, and no doubt the half-crown which he always gave her to

quail just as the thief was a great pleasure. Richard himself, on this occasion, hailed the day. He had been rather sad-hearted by the turn affairs had taken yesterday; and he found himself quite looking forward to being left in peace for the day alone with Dicky, and to the prospect of unlimited conversation with him.

There was a very early start from the house in the morning; much bustle and confusion, a great deal of running up and down stairs, and voices calling in all directions. But at length the carriage drove off, and the quiet of a summer's morning settled down upon the house.

Richard finished some work he had on hand, and then went in search of Dicky, with the intention of telling the nurse that he would take charge of the child, and keep him with him all day.

He found, however, that Dicky had a

headache. He was lying down in his own nursery, and the nurse thought he had better keep quiet and not go out in the sun.

Richard, therefore, had luncheon alone, and was conscious of a sense of disappointment at such being the case.

Directly after, however, he went upstairs again to see how Dicky was. His head was not much better, the nurse said, and she thought it would be wiser if he remained where he was. So Richard sat down by the bed, and said he would stay with him there. He read to him a long while, for Dicky liked nothing better, and would listen to reading for hours.

After his tea, however, he was tired, and said he should like his uncle to tell him a story instead of reading him one.

"One, you know, Uncle Richard, quite out of your own head."

Now, Richard Temple, writer and essayist

as he was, never "told stories." Little Geraldine knew this. Her father could talk, explain, read out loud by the hour; but he could not tell a story.

Either he had never had any creative imagination, or else the circumstances of his life and its prosaic development had dried it up, which was the more likely hypothesis of the two.

But the sight of this child had awakened, as we know, something long dormant within him; and the one story of his life, the one poem of his existence, was always rising before him. Almost before he knew it he began to tell a story. And the tale was of two children, who loved each other very much, and played together all the long summer days. Never a word passed between the two that was not loving; never a quarrel or a cross word darkened the joy of their love and their companionship. Every toy, every pleasure, was shared together. And their joys were

doubled thereby. But there came a day at last when both wanted something which could not be shared. Gain to one must be loss to the other.

Richard paused for a minute. Dicky looked perturbed. He liked stories to turn out well, and everybody to be happy.

"Could they not have divided it?" he said anxiously.

"Impossible," was the answer.

"It was a toy, I suppose," said Dicky—"something you could not cut in half?"

"It was something very beautiful," was the answer; "something very fair and perfect; but it could not be divided. One must have all or none."

Dicky looked very distressed. He could not bear sad stories.

"Does the story end happily at last?" he questioned rather fearfully. "Does it all turn out well in the end?"

"Must a story always end happily?" his uncle asked, smiling sadly. "Do things always turn out well?"

"I like them to," said Dicky wistfully.

"Yes? Well, it *did* turn out well for one of the children." A pause. "Not for the other. Shall I stop?"

"No, go on now," Dicky said; but his eyes had an anxious look in them. "Tell me what happened."

"Don't look so sad, my child," said Richard. "It is not worth it; it is an old story, and all over long ago. I think we will talk of something else."

"I must hear the end now," persisted Dicky. "I want just to know what happened."

"Only one thing *could* happen," was the reply. "One of the children gave up to the other."

"Was he very sorry?" asked Dicky fearfully; and his blue eyes had a look in them which made the elder man turn away.

"He was sorry just at first," he answered, trying to speak lightly; "but I dare say he has got other things to think of now." Then he suddenly bent over the child. "Dicky," he said, "it is your turn now, and you must talk to me. Tell me something about your home, and—your mother."

The words were barely out of his mouth before the quiet repose of the house was broken in upon by a renewal of the fuss and bustle of the morning.

The sound of the carriage returning from the station was followed by a chatter and a clatter in the hall—Alice's voice calling the servants, and little Geraldine's crying, "Daddy! Daddy! Where *can* daddy be?" all over the house.

Richard slipped out of the room, for he thought it better she should not come in to Dicky, as his head was still aching badly.

"Oh, here you are, daddy!" she exclaimed,

as he appeared on the landing. "I looked in the study, and I looked in the garden, and I couldn't see you anywhere." She was running breathlessly up the stairs as she spoke, with a large parcel in her arms. She had bought a present for Dicky, being very remorseful at having spoken unkindly to him yesterday, and had spent all the money her father had given her on it, as a little act of reparation. "Well, if she could not go in to Dicky, would daddy come downstairs with her, and look at the lovely thing? and then would he come and have a run with her in the garden?"

Hand in hand they proceeded downstairs.

But Alice was also lying in wait for Richard. She, too, had searched for him in the study and in the garden, and could not imagine where he could be.

The proposed run in the garden was negatived at once, and Geraldine ordered up to

the nursery to take off her best frock, and have her tea.

Alice was full of her day in London, and had running comments to make on all the little events and incidents of the day; how very nearly they had missed the express in the morning; how many neighbours she had found in the train going up; how gratified she had been at seeing "our member" deep in her husband's last article; the flattering remarks he had made on it; the hard day's shopping she had had; how fidgety and tiresome Geraldine had been over the fittings in the various shops; how the cabman had tried to overcharge her who had brought her to the London terminus, and how she had been too sharp for him, and had come off victorious; how careless the porter at their own station had been in leaving one of her most important parcels in the railway carriage; and how she had made him go back, and look into every

compartment until he found it, which was only *just* before the train was on the move, for the whistle had actually sounded, etc., etc.

Richard had to listen long and patiently before he found an opportunity of introducing the subject of Dicky's headache, and he really wished her to go and see what she thought of the little fellow. In all matters of health, he respected her opinion. But Alice was not anxious, and not at all inclined to hurry over her recital and go upstairs. When she did at last do so, she was away a very short time, and returned saying she did not think there was much amiss. She thought he had been touched up a little by the sun. He was hot, certainly; but she had given him some cooling medicine, and no doubt, after a night's rest, he would be all right again.

But she was quite wrong, for the next morning Dicky woke with a rash, which the

doctor pronounced to be an attack, though a slight one, of scarlatina.

Nevertheless, slight as it was, the fear that little Geraldine should run any risk, the danger of her catching it, was the same.

All the mother in Alice awoke. The recollection of what the child had gone through with measles, of the feverish subject she had then been proved to be, engendered in her a fear which amounted to panic.

She must take her away at once. She should not remain in the house another day.

Yes, Richard quite agreed. He was alarmed too. It was the only thing to be done. They must telegraph for rooms at an hotel at the seaside, and Alice must take her there as soon as possible. She had never had it herself either, and she must not expose herself to the risk of infection.

"And you?" said Alice.

"I shall remain," he answered.

"Must you?" said Alice nervously.

"There is no fear for me, if that is what you are thinking of," he answered; "I had it severely at school. I am not likely to take it again."

"No," said Alice, reassured; "and besides, you will not have to go even into the passage that leads to his room. I have hung a carbolic curtain over the door, and really this is a very good house for quarantine. He has his own nurse, and I have told one of the housemaids, who tells me she has had it, to wait upon them. So I think it is all satisfactorily arranged."

Little Geraldine demurred a little at first when she heard she was going alone with her mother, and that daddy was not coming too. But the alluring prospect of paddling in the sea without shoes or stockings did much in the way of consoling her; and besides, at her age, the morrow is always full of possibilities,

even when no distinct promises are made. She felt no doubt he would soon follow; that Dicky would soon get well and come too; and they would all be very happy and have great fun at the seaside together.

Soon every thought was merged in the excitement of packing for the start, and by-and-by there ensued all the bustle of departure.

Within a few hours of the doctor's announcement, Richard Temple was standing at the hall-door waving his hand to Alice and Geraldine as the carriage drove off to the station.

"Good-bye, daddy! Come very soon, daddy," his little daughter's voice was borne back to him as the carriage turned the corner of the drive. And it was hardly out of sight before he had passed behind the carbolic curtain, and taken his place by Dicky's bedside.

CHAPTER VIII

THE little fellow was not very ill. It was a mild attack, and the fever did not run very high.

Richard was with him quite as much as the nurse, taking his turn in the nursing while she went out for a walk; and at first sitting up alternate nights.

His writing went to the wall entirely.

He would leave any work in the middle if the child asked for him; and this Dicky was constantly doing.

The household informed the nurse that they had never known their master sit so little in his study since they had been in his service.

She was filled with admiring astonishment at

his capabilities as a nurse, his skill as well as his kindness and unselfishness.

"If the child had been his own," she said, "he could not have done more, and very few fathers would or could have done as much."

In a few days the little boy was better. The fever had run its course; and though he was weak, the doctor was satisfied with his progress.

And in the early days of Dicky's convalescence, Richard found the opportunity he had so long sought, of approaching the subject of which his mind was full, without fear of interruptions.

Bit by bit he drew Dicky on to speak of his mother and his home. There was little difficulty in doing so. The little fellow was only too glad to talk for any length of time of the mother he so evidently adored, and of all they had been wont to do together in his now far-distant home.

Any one who is in the habit of talking to children will know how many things they observe which pass unobserved by their elders; how many things they remember being said or done which have long since faded from their elders' recollection; how many things, indeed, there are going on all around us every day, which no one *but* a child would either observe or remember.

But trifles, after all, make up the sum of human existence, and their faithful recollection and reproduction are of the very essence of biography, as readers of "Lives" will be the first to admit.

Dicky had a singularly vivid and accurate memory; and, moreover, recalled things very graphically.

Little incidents that had occurred; little conversations that had been held; what "mother" had said or done; how she had looked when such and such things were said

or done in her presence ; little scraps of things she had told him ; advice she had from time to time given him ; all this and more was, by this little miniature Boswell, faithfully recalled and reported.

Richard Temple would sit, with his hand shading his eyes, drinking in all that the little fellow told him ; piecing together all the little details as they fell from the child's lips ; filling in all the lights and shades of the picture, till it stood out before him more and more clearly.

It was the picture of a childhood tenderly and wisely watched over ; the story of a little life of which the mother was the inspiration and the guiding star.

He recognized with a strange thrill, half pleasure, half pain, how much her methods resembled his own ; and how in the teaching of their respective children they had followed very much the same lines. She, too, had

believed in imagination and idealization, and had by those means sought to awaken in Dicky the sense of the "something behind" the Seen, and the "something beyond" the Known; and she, too, had evidently held that over-definite and exhaustive replies to children's questions are not always wise; and for the same reasons as himself. And her teaching had sunk into a soil very ready to receive it. There was no difficulty in planting in that imaginative and poetic little mind the belief in mystery everywhere, and instilling thereby the spirit of reverence and humility.

"Mother says that when I am older I shall understand many things that I am too young to understand now. Some things even *she*, herself, does not understand! But she says, what she does not understand she can trust to God; for *He* understands everything, and some day, she says, He will explain."

No; there was none of the modern spirit

in Dicky. His was the pure trust and unquestioning faith which there ought to be in every little child.

And as day by day the tale unfolded itself, that central figure likewise unfolded itself more and more distinctly.

Richard was struck after a time at the slight mention of the father in the child's retrospections. He emphasized the subject to see if he could get the boy to talk about him. He told him what friends they had been in their youth; related stories of some of their boyish doings together, but there was little or no response.

It was the mother, and the mother only, with whom every thought and every reflection seemed to be intertwined.

He incidentally questioned him on his relations with his father, but he elicited very little.

"No, father did not play with him much,

or talk to him often, not nearly so much as Uncle Richard himself. He had no time. He was always so dreadfully busy, and when he had any time, it was mother he wanted, not Dicky." It seemed, indeed, as if the father was the one who called the mother away from Dicky when she was reading to him, or playing with him; and, according to Dicky, she always went directly he called her, even if she was right in the middle of a story or a game; and this the child seemed to take as a matter of course.

A lump came into Richard's throat at the thought of what the love that existed between the husband and wife must be, with which even a precious only child might not intermeddle.

But still he wondered a little at the small part the father seemed to play in the child's life, and some words dropped by the nurse once or twice seemed to confirm the impression

which the little boy's conversation had conveyed. She was apparently not much attached to her master. Richard was puzzled.

Sitting by Dicky's side when he was asleep, and going over in his mind all that the child had been saying, a feeling somehow rose in his mind that there was a flaw somewhere in the home life. He felt as if some cloud hung over it. Perfect as the relationship between mother and child appeared to be, still this was the impression left upon his mind.

One day, when referring in conversation with the boy to his father's high spirits, Dicky looked distinctly surprised. It was evidently quite a new idea to him.

"Oh no, father was grave, not merry. It was mother who always had to try and make him laugh. Mother was often very grave when she was alone with Dicky, but never when father was in the room. She always smiled when the door opened and he came

in. She was always merry when he was there."

"Oh, sir," said the nurse one day, "how glad Mrs. Fox would have been if Mr. Fox had been as fond of children as you are! He took so very little notice of Master Dicky, and it was a trouble to her, I am sure, though she never said anything about it."

Richard found Dicky's remarks and those of the nurse very difficult to reconcile with his recollection of his friend, his kindly affectionate nature, his unselfishness, the charm of his gay spirits and merry flow of conversation.

"Light-hearted Leonard" had been his nickname at college. There had always been, too, so much of the "eternal boy" about him, even as a man, that Richard would have thought he would have been a most delightful companion for a child, the very model of young fatherhood. Also, he would have imagined, a most popular master in his own household.

He must have strangely altered. And why? —he who, from Richard's point of view, had all the best things this world has to offer. He would have liked to draw out the nurse upon the subject; but his own good feeling, as well as his loyalty to his friend, made it out of the question.

The days passed on, and the weather got hot. Dicky suffered a good deal from heat; and one especially sultry afternoon Richard had his bed moved nearer to the open window, so that the soft air should fan his face as he lay. He sent the nurse out for a drive, for she was rather overdone with nursing and anxiety, and he remained in charge of Dicky himself.

Dicky enjoyed the change in his position. He could hear the twittering of the birds on the trees outside, and could see the green fields and hills stretching away into the distance beyond the garden. The soft summer sounds

made him drowsy after a time, and gradually his eyes closed.

Richard was drowsy too. He was feeling the effects of sitting up at night; and by-and-by he also closed his eyes. He was not asleep, but he was dreaming nevertheless. Dicky had talked ceaselessly of his mother that day, and the picture he had unconsciously painted was before Richard now.

He found himself trying to piece together the Geraldine who had been the ideal of his manhood, and the Geraldine who was the angel of the child's young life.

There was nothing inharmonious in the two pictures; either was fair and perfect, either realized his ideal of what a woman should be, and they easily blended together.

But by-and-by the day-dream became a real one, for he, like Dicky, fell asleep. And as he slept she came to him; she rose in his vision, and stood for a moment before him.

The dream was so clear, so vivid—so *alive* was the sweet face with its earnest and thoughtful expression, the smile in the deep-set eyes, that he could hardly believe that it was only a dream.

He could have cried to the passing moment, "Stay! for thou art fair," but it passed away all too quickly. The dream vanished. For a step in the passage outside had roused him, and the opening of the bedroom door woke him with a start to the prosaic realities of every-day life.

It was the housemaid who waited upon Dicky, and she had a telegram in her hand. He made a sign to her to put it down upon the table. She did so, and noiselessly withdrew. He did not take it up at first. He was expecting a telegram from his publisher. There would be plenty of time to attend to it later. The joy of his dream still lingered, and his thoughts were far away.

* * *

Some time went by.]
The clock ticked slowly
stillness of the room.]
the trees outside the wind
other sound to be heard.

For Richard Temple
statue, with that open te
It was a foreign one, a
words :—

"Geraldine has started
Majestic. Meet her at Sou

CHAPTER IX

HALF an hour went by, and still he sat there, motionless.

The ticking of the clock said, "Geraldine has started," and the twittering birds outside sang the same refrain.

"Geraldine has started!" That meant—let him try to realize it—that she would be *here*, in England; *she*, Geraldine Eden!

That meant—let him think it out well—that she would be in his house, in this very room, an inmate of his home.

He passed his hand over his head in a bewildered way once or twice, as he tried to bring these facts before his mind.

Coming! Coming on the 24th, in less

Suddenly, as he thought o
his hands with a gesture o
reopening of wounds he h
healed, this rising of ghosts
long laid, this sounding aga
music ; he *could* not bear it.
The wounds were *not* healed
not laid, the past was not l
was forgotten. His feeling
changed !

Better a thousand times
come. Better a thousand tim
not rest upon her face again ;
so loved, ay, God help him
and knew he always shoul
strong deep love of his whol

What was he to do?

Coming on the 24th! Coming into his house, coming into this very room! She was coming, alone; to him, alone. They would sit one on each side of the little bed; the common interest of the little sick child uniting them.

The sick child. Ah! there was the safety of it. It was not the Geraldine he had known who was coming; not Geraldine Eden. No; it was an anxious mother coming to a beloved child.

This it was which was bringing about this strange, this painful meeting. None of it had anything to do with him. He had no part nor lot in the matter. Let her come, then. What did it signify? He would suffer, of course, but he was used to that. Had he not been the one to suffer all along?

His meditations were interrupted by Dicky's weak little voice.

stirred and was waking.
had not time to debate i
had better say; how mu
state would be able to
In his bewilderment he s
"It is from your fathe
A light came into the b
"From father?" he s
does he say?"
Richard hesitated.
"Is it anything about n
"Yes."
"*Is she coming to see m*
low, half-audible voice.
and his

"Yes, Dicky," he answered, unconsciously repeating the words which had been running in his head for so long, "she is coming; coming on the 24th. Are you glad?" he added eagerly, feeling it would be a relief to hear some one who had a right to do so, give themselves up to the joy of the prospect without any conflicting feelings.

"*Glad!*" murmured the child. He stopped so suddenly that Richard looked up quickly, and as quickly looked away. For the child's face was transfigured and illumined by a joy so great, so overwhelming, that Richard felt a lump rising in his throat. It touched him to the quick. He felt if he were to live a hundred years from that moment he should never forget the radiance of that smile.

But the little boy was too weak for any kind of emotion or excitement, and the sudden pallor of his face alarmed his uncle. He got up and fetched him some water, and then set

to work to try and divert his thoughts. He took up a story-book he had been reading to him, and went on with it, to see if that would distract him.

But it was no use.

"I can't listen to reading, Uncle Richard. Won't you talk to me instead?"

"Yes, dear. What shall we talk about?"

"Or will you tell me a story?"

"A story, darling? Well, I will try. What shall it be about?"

"Tell me the story again what you once told me before, about the two little friends that both wanted the same thing, which only one could have."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Richard. "Not that story! Any story but that. I can't tell you that story again. Not to-day, Dicky," he added, almost imploringly. "Do not ask me to tell it to you to-day!" Seeing Dicky's astonishment at his vehemence, he added, more

quietly, "That was a sad story, you know. It didn't end well; and you don't like sad stories, and stories that don't end well, do you?"

"But make it end well this time."

"Make it end well! How can I, my child? The story was a true one. It was a foolish little story, dear. You must try and forget it."

"That is just what mother once said to me about one of her stories which ended badly. Her stories generally ended well; but she said she could never make this one end well; because it was a true one. Shall I tell it to you?"

"Yes, dear, do."

"It was about a little child," said Dicky, "who had a great, great longing. Day after day he longed for something, and day after day he longed for it more and more. He could not get it of himself, she said; he must wait till it came to him. And he waited and

waited on. But it never came. It went far, far away. So when he found it was never, never coming, he gave it up, and because he saw he could never, never have what he longed for, he took something else that was offered him instead." Dicky paused. "But mother said she would never advise any one to do what that child had done. 'Mind, Dicky,' she said, 'never do it. If you cannot have the thing you long for, go without altogether. But never take something else instead.' And then mother kissed me over and over again, and I saw she was crying. But just then the door opened, and father came in. And she whispered to me not to say anything more about the story; and she smiled at father, and began to talk to him and to laugh about all sorts of things. Afterwards, when he was gone, and I asked her to go on with the story, she wouldn't. It ended badly, she said, and she couldn't make it end well, because it was

a true one. I must try and forget it, she said. It was a foolish little story, and she could not think what had made her tell it to me."

Tired by the effort of such a long spell of talk, Dicky's head sank back upon the pillow, and, with his uncle's hand clasped tight in his, he gradually fell asleep.

* * * * *

When the nurse came in from her drive, she was horrified at the greyness of Mr. Temple's face, as he raised it for a moment, and signed to her that the child was sleeping.

"Oh, sir," she whispered anxiously, "are you ill?"

He shook his head.

"The room is very hot," he said. "I will go out when you have had your tea."

She looked at him with surprise; for it was evening now, and the room was as cool as

possible, and he had the air of one who does not know what he is saying.

"I trust he has not taken the fever," she said to herself, as she stole softly from the room.

And so, there alone with Dicky, Richard Temple fought it out.

Consumed with fever he was, doubtless; but not the fever of which the nurse was thinking. His blood was coursing hotly through his veins with the fever of a vain and passionate regret, a futile and hopeless sorrow, a wild, tumultuous battling against his fate.

Yes; the scales had fallen from his eyes at last—those eyes which had been holden for so long—and the truth of the past was clear.

"Because she saw that it was never, never coming, she took something else instead."

"It was all a mistake! All a mistake!" The words broke from him like a cry.

There, with Dicky's hand in his, and his own tears—the tears of a strong man in his pain—falling upon both, he wrestled rebelliously against the irreparable, the irretrievable, the pitiless past!

For,

> "Of all sad words of book or pen,
> The saddest are these, 'It might have been!'"

CHAPTER X

But once out of the sick-room and in the open air—in the beautiful stillness of the summer evening, with the song of the birds all around him, and the soft summer breeze in his face—there came a startling revulsion of feeling.

His sadness fled away, and was succeeded by a bounding sense of happiness. A rush of joy swept over him and completely carried him away.

She was coming! She had loved him all the time, and—she was coming!

She would be here on the 24th. He would go down to Southampton to meet her, and bring her home.

He should see her again after all the long years; be able to tell her how it had all been; explain to her what a terrible mistake it had been on both sides; and how, while she was vainly waiting and waiting, he had been suffering too, wearing his heart out with wounded love and disappointment.

He would be able to show her he was not, and never had been, the heartless and faithless man she must have supposed him. He would hold her hands in his; see her dear face light up, and then—ah, yes! Then—what?

Oh, what use and of what avail was this discovery? None! What could come of it? Nothing—worse than nothing, only new pain and trouble for both. Far better they should never meet. No good and satisfaction could ever come of such a meeting. Better a thousand times it should never take place.

her sick child. Should h
the house to her ? But
action to her, to Leonard,

Then slowly it came
Geraldine knew nothing.
of it. His recent disc
her in any way. She n
had always loved her, no
learnt that his love had alv
She would never know
Better for both she should
must not tell her. He mu
the coming interview, and
her what she still though
must always have thou

light of his recent discovery, be able to act this part? He might have done it yesterday; but now? How *could* he? It was an impossible position. He felt he could not face it. How be in her dear presence, knowing all he did, calm and silent? How clasp her hand and listen to her voice unmoved?

"Oh no," his rebellious heart cried out, "this was asking too much of him! He *must* just tell her. He must clear himself in her eyes, must just set things right between them. They must for once stand soul to soul and hand in hand; and then——"

Yes. Then?

Again the question arose, "What then?"

And again came the answer, "*Nothing!*"

* * * * *

That night was the most sleepless Richard Temple had ever spent. He lay awake hour after hour, revolving the position in his mind, and all sorts of thoughts coursing

through his heated brain. Sometimes he reviewed it from one point, sometimes from another. Sometimes self-pity filled his mind to the exclusion of every other thought; and again sometimes his heart ached for his friend.

For he thought with a new meaning of all the child had from time to time said about his father's gravity, which had so puzzled him, and made it so difficult for him to identify the light-hearted, high-spirited Leonard Fox he had known. Leonard, poor Leonard, who held, and knew it, only the casket, from which the jewel was gone!

Sometimes, and this the most often of all, sorrow for *her* overpowered him.

"Always smiled if the door opened, and father came in. She was grave when alone with Dicky, but she was always merry if father was in the room."

How different an interpretation he had put upon all this, but how clear it all was to him

now! Forced cheerfulness, unreal gaiety, to hide an unsatisfied, perchance an aching, heart.

> "'I have a smiling face,' she said,
> 'I have a jest for all I meet.
> Grief taught me this sad smile,' she said.
> '*Behind no prison gates,*' *she said,*
> '*Which bar the sunshine half a mile,*
> *Are captives so uncomforted*
> *As souls behind a smile!*'"

But ere daylight dawned he had come to one resolution, which, so help him God! he would keep for ever, even in the coming temptation of her beloved presence in his home.

He would add nothing, not one iota, to the burden of her life by telling her how it had really been. It would be the grossest selfishness, and would serve no end. The bar of an irrevocable step, on both sides stood, and would ever stand, between them.

She knew nothing. *And she should never know!*

His secret had always been unshared—it must be unshared still!

CHAPTER XI

News greeted him the next morning that Dicky was not so well.

He had had a restless night, and seemed feverish and ailing this morning.

The nurse was uneasy about him, and the doctor on arriving confirmed their fears.

Complications known in cases of scarlatina showed signs of setting in, and the doctor was anxious. The child, he said, was not in a satisfactory condition.

Still, there was nothing serious at present. He might get better in a day or two.

It was in some sense almost a relief to Richard to have his thoughts distracted, and to feel that when the fateful moment of

Geraldine's arrival came, they would be both so absorbed in the sick child as to have no room for other thoughts.

But as the days went by Dicky grew worse instead of better.

The doctor now became seriously alarmed, and asked for further advice.

A great London physician was summoned to meet him in consultation.

The result was not satisfactory. He could not give much hope, he said.

When was the child's mother expected? Could anything be done to accelerate her arrival?

And so by degrees the question became, not would the child get better, but would the mother arrive in time?

And now, of course, all idea of Richard's going to meet her must be abandoned.

He must send some one with a letter to Southampton to await the arrival of the

Majestic, and remain himself at home to share the responsibility with the nurse.

Though not, alas! to save, at any rate to prolong the little flickering life till the mother arrived, became now Richard's one absorbing idea, and beyond it he did not look.

Every day that the little boy lived through was a gain, for it at least brought the day of her arrival nearer, and increased the chance of their meeting.

And the eve of the 24th came.

Dicky woke in the night; he seldom spoke now, but Richard saw that his lips framed once more his once constant question, "When will she be here?"

"To-morrow, darling," was Richard's answer, bending over him. "Go to sleep quick. The night will soon pass, you know, and she will be here—to-morrow!"

"I shall see her," murmured Dicky—"in the morning!"

They were the last words he spoke.

The grey dawn came into the room, and he was in a profound sleep, but it was a sleep that knew no waking.

Indeed, so gradual, so gentle, was the passing of Dicky, that neither Richard nor the nurse knew when the exact moment was; so quiet, so peaceful was it that they could not tell when the end came.

> "Their very fears belied their hopes,
> Their hopes their fears belied;
> They thought him dying when he slept,
> And sleeping when he died!"

Thus dawned the morning of the 24th, and a few hours later Richard Temple started for Southampton.

CHAPTER

He had been to meet retu
and he knew well the scer
was arriving ; the expectant l
of passengers on board th
all eagerly looking out for
expectant friends on shore.
her standing there, as he rem
slight, graceful, looking out,
for the messenger he was, h
news he had to bring. So h
mothers stand, looking out w
nothing else, for the form

thought of the message he was bringing, the tale he had to tell. Her eyes would ask the question, the only question she would have to ask him, "Is it well with the child?"

And sooner or later, somehow or other, he must answer it. His voice must speak the fatal words, his hand must deal the fatal blow. In the face of such a thought, his own share in the tragedy had, he found to his intense relief, sunk altogether into the background.

And so the great ship hove in sight, and came slowly steaming up the harbour—the ship with Geraldine on board. It came steadily on; and he scanned with all his life in his glance the crowded decks for the first indication of the figure he expected. His heart stood still, and there was a mist before his eyes, for he was dazed with the chaos of thoughts rushing and whirling within him, and he could not, do what he would, distinguish it. The mist cleared, and he looked again.

There were signs now of recognition all round him, and waving of hats and handkerchiefs, as first one person and then another distinguished his or her loved ones on board; but he saw no one who in the least brought to his mind Geraldine Eden. Either she was so altered that he did not know her—and, after all, it was nearly nine years since he had seen her—or else she was not there. Perhaps she had changed her mind, and had not come after all!

For a moment he felt a great sense of relief; for, though he hardly knew what he wished or what he dreaded most, the prominent feeling was a shrinking from meeting her with such a blow to deal.

Well, many other expected ones *had* come; and their friends began to push eagerly forward and to swarm on board. He followed mechanically with the rest.

And now joyous welcomes were going on

all round him. Parents embraced children; wives were clasped in the arms of their husbands; brothers, sisters, lovers, friends, met once more. The eager chattering throng even began to melt away as they hurried off the ship; and still, nowhere, apparently, was the figure of which he was in search.

Perhaps she was in her cabin, and did not care to come on deck with the crowd. He must ask for information. He made his way up to one of the ship's crew, and asked if a lady of the name of Mrs. Fox had come in the ship. The man did not know, but he turned to another a little way off and passed the question on to him.

"Go to the captain, sir," answered this one; "any one asking for Mrs. Fox was to go straight to the captain."

"And where is the captain?"

"Engaged just now, sir, but I will take you to his cabin; and you can wait for him there."

a few minutes before the
captain, an elderly, weather
Richard rose to meet hi
The captain shot a keer
under his shaggy, overhang
"Are you a relation
asked gravely.
"Yes," said Richard, s
am her—brother-in-law, a
meet her, unhappily with
a heavy blow to deal her.
There was a slight pause
"She will never need t
the captain; "she is spar
news you have to tell."

"Mrs. Fox died," he said gently, "this morning."

* * * * *

Richard Temple showed no emotion, no surprise. He had a feeling now that he had known from the first what the captain was going to say, that he had known from the moment that he entered the cabin that this was to be the end of it all; and as he bowed his head upon his hands for a moment, he felt that it was the only solution, the only possible solution, to the tragedy of the whole situation. For the moment the prominent feeling in his mind was one of intense thankfulness that she was where the pain of his message would never reach her.

He was able after a time to ask a few questions, and to listen to the details of her illness.

She had been struck down by a malarial fever of a severe type a few days after the ship started. But she had never known that she

had not reached her sick child; for a merciful delirium had brought her to his bedside, and she had in fancy tended him and soothed him and talked to him all day long.

"I have wearied for you, Dicky," she had said over and over again, "and I know you have wearied for me, but we are together again at last!"

She had been restless, they told him, all yesterday, but as the night approached she grew calmer, and she had died with a smile on her lips. Her last words had been, "Good night! good night, my darling!" And they thought they heard her say, "We shall meet, you know, in the morning!"

And they had!

This was the thought which came down upon Richard's spirit with such a sense of full satisfaction that it almost amounted to happiness. Yes, mother and child were together now, and for them there was no parting any more. The miles of land and water which lay

between them only yesterday were crossed, the shadow of parting which had hung over them had vanished, distance was annihilated, and sorrow was turned into joy. For the dark night of their separation had passed away, and they had met !—as they had been wont to do—in the morning !

* * * * *

And then, alone, he passed into the darkened cabin, where, wrapped in dreamless slumber, the still form lay.

There, in her long last sleep, her beautiful features carved in marble, and a smile upon her lips, lay what had once been Geraldine Eden.

And as he stood gazing down upon her, in the hush of a stillness broken only by the wash of the water against the sides of the ship, all earth-bound thoughts fled away. For the fair face, in its absolute repose, brought to him that sense of *aloofness* which the sight of the quiet unconscious dead is so prone to bring.

He had come with the tumult of his feelings flooding every part of his being, but in that still presence they fell into the background, and he found no place for them at all.

So far removed did she seem from him, so entirely apart from the storm and stress of life!

For in its hopes and fears, its joys and sorrows, she had no part now, and with its misunderstandings and disappointments, its unfulfilled hopes, and its withheld completions, she had now no more to do.

It was with reverence only, in that awe-struck silence, that he gazed upon the still, fair face.

If he had looked for any signs of suffering in it there were none to be seen.

If hers had been like his, a *vie manquée*, there was no trace of it now. Sorrow and sighing had left no mark upon it.

For "it is only the finite that suffers, the infinite lies stretched in smiling repose."

POSTSCRIPT

Time passes quickly, and what seems a lifetime at the moment becomes only an episode in a lifetime as time goes on.

Alice and little Geraldine came home after the house had been thoroughly purified and disinfected, and life resumed its usual course. There was nothing outward to show what had happened but two new graves side by side in the churchyard, which little Geraldine tended with loving care, and where pansies and forget-me-nots flourished.

The waters closed over the little episode, and no other mark seemed to be left behind.

Engraven on the one stone that covered the two graves was a verse chosen by the absent husband and father:—

"They loved in their lives, and in death they were not divided."

There was another verse below, this one chosen by some one else; but of that by-and-by.

Within the year, Leonard Fox married again.

The letter to his sister announcing his engagement contained the following sentence, as if he wished to excuse himself for so early a re-marriage :—

"Alice, she never cared for me. She did her best, and the child filled her life; but we made a terrible mistake."

His second wife adored him, sons and daughters were born to him. He was happy and satisfied; the past faded away, and Geraldine and Dicky were forgotten.

But a solitary figure may often be seen on summer evenings, or on autumn afternoons, standing by the graves where lie the two beings

who—his own child not excepted—have had most power to stir his feelings and to touch his heart.

It is at sunset that Richard Temple loves best to be there, for then it is that the slanting rays of sunlight fall on the golden letters of the second verse engraven on the stone, and illumine words which are to him not only a pathetic recollection of the past, but a promise full of hope for the future :—

"Heaviness may endure for a night; but joy cometh in the morning!"

He buried himself once more in his work. But a change had passed over his writing. It was as clear and as concise as ever, his style as terse and epigrammatic as before, the crisp, telling sentences his admirers so delighted in were there, as crisp and telling as ever, but the cynicism and the bitterness had disappeared from his essays, their caustic character was gone.

The hard and pessimistic tone, the

underlying bitterness of a man out of conceit with life and human nature; all that had disappeared, and disappeared for ever. There is a gentler and more hopeful note in his writing, and mothers no longer regret to see his works in the hands of their young sons, as they used to do, fearing that they will become imbued with cynicism, pessimism, and all the other "isms." Such fears have died away.

The reading of his essays has now a different effect on his readers; his books are put down with a more hopeful view of things and a clearer insight into the perplexed meaning of life than when they were taken up.

For Richard Temple is a happier man! True, he has only outwardly what he had before to make him so; his work, his fame, and his little daughter.

But he has inwardly that which had been wanting in his life, and the want of which had poisoned all his existence—a sweet and tender

memory; peaceful recollections so free from bitterness as to be almost happy. She had not been heartless and faithless, after all; she had not wilfully deceived him. It was all a mistake, and the mistake was of his own making. His ideal has returned to him. There is no cloud upon his past now.

And as to the present, he knows that it is best as it is—best for her, best for him, best for all concerned.

It was the only solution, the only possible solution of a question fraught with untold pain, sorrow, and difficulty.

Between them, had she lived, would always have been the bar, the insuperable barrier of an irretrievable step on both sides; and his own life, with its unshared secret, would have been well-nigh unbearable.

But now that secret is no longer unshared, for death has revealed what life would have hidden.

She knows now what he never, never would have told her; she understands how it has all been, and she is waiting for him in the land "where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven!"



RACHEL



RACHEL

CHAPTER I

"GLAMOUR, my dear boy, nothing but glamour. The Violet Montresor of your imagination and the real Violet Montresor do not resemble each other in the faintest degree, and I ought to know my own niece, who has lived in my house ever since her father died three years ago. I tell you, you have idealized her. She is not all you imagine her to be. And she is not the wife for you, I do assure you."

So spoke Middle-Age, and Common-sense, in the person of Colonel Montresor, uncle and guardian to the said Violet Montresor, to a young man deeply in love; and spoke as

Middle-Age and Common-sense ever speak to the young under such circumstances—in vain!

Kenneth Mackenzie looked at the older man partly with indignation and partly with pitying contempt, as at a man whose eyes were holden, who had lived near perfection for three years, and had never discovered it.

He had just been accepted by his lady-love, and had come in the first fresh blush of his joy and exultation to lay his affairs before her uncle, and to ask his consent to their marriage.

"She is a great deal too good for me. I am not worthy of her," was the answer, spoken in a voice of deep feeling.

"Infatuated idiot!" was the older man's inward reflection. But aloud he only said, "And for a phantom like this you are going to give up your military career and resign your commission!"

"What else can I do?" replied Kenneth

Mackenzie. "I cannot ask Violet to follow the baggage-waggon; that is out of the question. I should not wish it for her, and she herself has the strongest objection to the idea. So I must look out for something in the City. She tells me she would like to live in London."

"I have no doubt she would; and the worst place in the world for her," Colonel Montresor muttered to himself impatiently.

He was sorry, genuinely sorry, that this thing should have occurred. He had a great affection for Kenneth Mackenzie, who was the son of a dead friend, and he had a high opinion of the young man.

He had *not* a very high opinion of his niece, and he sincerely wished the two had not been thrown together as they unfortunately had been during the last five weeks, owing to a slight hunting accident which had occurred to Kenneth while on

what was to have been a flying visit to his house, but which had thereby been prolonged, with this unfortunate result.

There was no actual harm in Violet, but she was a frivolous girl, selfish, self-indulgent, and bent upon amusement; and he regretted immensely that a fine young soldier like Kenneth, who had hitherto shown such keenness for his profession, should spoil his future and abandon his career for her sake.

"Surely," he said, "it must cost you something to give up the Service?"

Kenneth winced for a moment, and then answered—

"If there were ever any chance of seeing active service, I might hesitate; but I have been at it now nearly ten years, and I am sick of parades and drills, drills and parades, and nothing more. I have little chance of promotion, and shall probably be retired, like so many others, before I am forty. I don't

think it is worth staying on in the Army for such a prospect as *that*."

"You never thought of all this before," said Colonel Montresor. "This is not your real reason. You are throwing away your career in a moment of mad folly, and you will regret it bitterly some day, when it will be too late. Now listen to me. I do not say I will refuse my consent to your marrying my niece, but I only give it on certain conditions. You must wait a year. At the end of that time come to me again. And if you are both of the same mind, I will say nothing against the marriage. But my conditions are these: First, that you do not resign your commission until the year is over; and secondly, that you both be perfectly free in the mean time. There must be no definite engagement, and you must neither meet nor write to each other in the interval."

The young man protested in vain. Colonel

Montresor was firm. Kenneth Mackenzie, very crestfallen, sought his lady-love at the end of the interview, to break to her her uncle's ultimatum; and Colonel Montresor threw himself into his armchair with a chuckle, much pleased with himself and his own tact and diplomacy. "I think I have knocked that little affair on the head," he said, *sotto voce*. "A year is a long time, and I would not give much for Kenneth's chance with Miss Violet if some more eligible suitor presents himself in the interval. He is miles too good for her; and I shall have done him a good turn if it all ends in smoke, as I feel sure it will, and prevented him, moreover, from throwing up his career in a hurry, and leaving one of the finest regiments in the Service."

Meanwhile, the lovers were having their farewell talk.

"So you see, darling," Kenneth was saying, "I am to serve for you as Jacob did for

Rachel. You are my Rachel," he added tenderly, "and the time will not seem long, for I shall be like him, and we know the years seemed to him but a few days, 'for the love he bore her.'"

"And, fortunately," said Violet lightly, "I have no elder sister. So Laban cannot palm a Leah off upon you at the end of the time instead!"

She was, after all, only continuing the little parable he had begun; but the lightness of her words and tone at such a moment chilled him a little. And the next day they parted.

* * * * *

Colonel Montresor had hit upon the worst plan he could have devised to accomplish his end; at any rate, as far as his niece was concerned. For Violet was headstrong and obstinate; and it is to be observed that in cases of this kind the latter quality often does

duty for what is looked upon as fidelity, loyalty, and steadfastness.

She was not really in love with Kenneth Mackenzie—though she thoroughly enjoyed his admiring devotion, and his absolute belief in her perfections—but she wanted to be married; she wanted to get away from her uncle and aunt; she craved for liberty, freedom, independence, and a gayer life. She thought marriage would give all this.

Opposition, too, put her on her mettle. She was annoyed at her uncle's interference in the matter; and she was determined to prove to him that he was mistaken in supposing she did not know her own mind.

And so it came to pass that the year ebbed away, and found her just as bent on marrying Kenneth Mackenzie as she had been at first.

One morning Colonel Montresor was reading *The Times* at breakfast, when his eye fell on the following in the *Gazette* of the

evening before, among the promotions in Kenneth's regiment: "Lieutenant Wood to be captain; *vice* Kenneth Mackenzie, who resigns his commission."

He threw down the paper with an exclamation, and found a letter from Kenneth lying at his side.

It announced that the year was over; and that he claimed his promise. Might he come down that evening? And in another moment Violet entered the room, all smiles and excitement, with an open letter in her hand, which she handed to him without hesitation, and a triumphant "There!" Colonel Montresor was old now, but he had not so completely outgrown all sentiment, or at any rate its memory, as not to be rather scandalized at an ardent love-letter being thus submitted to the reading of a third person. He handed it back to her; but as he did so his eyes fell upon the following lines at the end of the first page:—

" Rachel we serve for long years, that seem a few days only,
E'en for the love we have to her, and win her at last from Laban."

"Poor young fellow!" was his inward reflection.

The game was up, and he knew he could do nothing more.

"You can telegraph to him to come down," he said.

"I have already done so," answered Violet.

So Kenneth came, and the wedding-day was fixed.

It took place about a month after; and after a brief honeymoon abroad, the young couple settled in a small house in London.

CHAPTER II

KENNETH MACKENZIE had his patrimony, and Violet a small fortune of her own; but it was necessary to supplement this. He accordingly sought and found that vague "Something in the City" of which he had spoken to Colonel Montresor. It was lucrative, but very hard work, and necessitated his being away from home from nine in the morning till past five in the afternoon. It was uncongenial work to him, and he disliked it immensely; but he grudged nothing that was to help him to give Violet all she wanted.

The newly married pair thus began a life very common in these days; when the young wife, left to herself and her own devices the whole

day long, has to find occupation or amusement as the case may be, to fill up the hours of her husband's absence.

So Violet at once got the freedom, liberty, and independence she had so coveted; and having absolutely no resources and no occupation, set to work to provide herself with amusement. After a diligent sowing of cards, she found herself full of engagements. She went out to luncheon every day; and one or two young married friends with open carriages were very attentive to her in the matter of drives and shopping. She had no carriage of her own as yet; though Kenneth hoped, he told her, that in time he should see his way to provide her with this luxury.

"Necessity, *I* call it," had been her rejoinder to this remark.

Gradually it came about that when he got home from the City she was always out. The first time this happened, he was not only

dreadfully disappointed, but very much surprised. He had hurried home to take her out in the park, and flying upstairs three steps at a time, had entered the drawing-room with an apologetic, "I'm afraid I'm rather late——" to find the room was empty.

"She *might* have waited for me," he had said to himself on hearing from the servant that Mrs. Mackenzie had given him up, and gone out driving with Lady Fanny Talbot. He waited on, thinking she would surely come in in time to take a little walk with him before dinner; but it was nearly dressing-time before she dashed up to the door in an open carriage. She came leisurely upstairs, and made a very slight apology for not having waited for him; but he was so late, she said, and it was so hot, that as Lady Fanny had called to ask her to drive with her, she had accepted the offer.

He said very little that first time, but in a

day or two it happened again. He was very busy in the City just then, and could not be sure of being home at any particular hour. This time he did remonstrate. She might have given him a little law, he said; or, at any rate, have left him a message to say when she would be back. He had waited and waited on, till it was too late for him to get a walk at all, as they were dining out.

Violet did not like the faintest shadow of blame, and retorted rather quickly. She was so accustomed to his admiring devotion, that she could not at all understand his finding fault.

The third time it happened, his remonstrances were couched in rather strong terms; but it only drew upon him the remark that she thought it was very *exigeant* of him to expect her to sit cooped up in that hot room, waiting for him, when she could be out in the fresh air in an open carriage.

The next time he did not wait for her, but

went out by himself; and by degrees, finding it so little use, he ceased to give himself the trouble of hurrying home in the heat for nothing. He was tired in the evenings with his unwonted work, and would often have willingly stayed at home, and spent a quiet evening with her, but that did not amuse Violet at all; and she had by this time made so many acquaintances, and contracted so many engagements, that they dined out almost every night, so that practically they spent no time at all *tête-à-tête*. If he objected to so much society, she told him he was selfish. She was younger than he was, and she had never had her fling. She wanted to enjoy herself a little. Why should he begrudge her a little amusement?

That she was headstrong and obstinate he soon began to discover. Also, that opposition always made her more determined. A wrangle went against him. He would rather anything

than that. He did not wish to drive matters to extremities; and so it generally ended in her getting her own way. The season came to an end; and in August Kenneth got a holiday, and they paid some visits in Scotland. But September found them again settled in London, and Violet found her life now a very different one. Every one, of course, was away, and she did not know what to do with herself.

One day, when Kenneth came home from the City, she announced to him with great delight that Mr. and Lady Fanny Talbot were going for a few weeks' tour in Italy, and had asked her to go with them. Kenneth looked grave. He was *very* sorry, he told her, but it was quite impossible; he could not get another holiday so soon.

"But why should not I go without you?" she said, and she said it rather defiantly, as if she anticipated and meant to combat any objection he might raise.

Well, after all, when he came to think of it, why shouldn't she? She would be sure to think him selfish and *exigeant* if he objected; and—perhaps he was!

"Do you *wish* to go?" he asked.

"Yes, I do, very much," she answered. "There is not a soul in London, and I am bored to death here all day long by myself."

He was a proud man, and he did not let her see how hurt he was.

"Very well," he said quietly; "if you wish it so much, you had better go."

His manner was very grave, rather constrained, but she did not notice it.

"After all, it is only for a few weeks," she said.

"No," he repeated, "it is only for a few weeks, after all."

So she went, leaving him with a light "Good-bye, old boy. Take care of yourself!"

They had been married just five months.

CHAPTER III

LEFT alone in London in September, the town deserted, and the clubs empty, Kenneth Mackenzie fell into very low spirits. He was accustomed to an active, outdoor life, and to the society of his brother officers; and the life he was leading unsuited him in every way.

The first fortnight of Violet's absence passed; and September had passed into October, when an event occurred which woke up all the soldier in Kenneth, and filled his mind with the most poignant, the most bitter regrets. The war in South Africa broke out!

The chance of active service which he had thought was hopeless had come—but for him it had come too late! To make things worse

for him, his old regiment was one of the first to be ordered out; and, with a pang which no words of mine can describe, he went down to Southampton and saw it start.

What wonder that, sitting that night alone in his empty house, he should ask himself bitterly for what he had sacrificed his career; and what he had got in exchange? And the answer forced itself upon him in no measured language —a hard, grinding life which his soul abhorred, a selfish and neglectful wife, and a deserted home!

What wonder either that when, shortly after, every able-bodied man in England was volunteering to go in some capacity or other, Kenneth Mackenzie should volunteer with the rest? He was accepted; telegraphed to Violet to come home at once if she wished to see him before he went, and was soon knee-deep in his preparations. But the days went by, and he got no answer. He commended her

to the care of her uncle during his absence; and made all necessary arrangements for her in case of anything happening to himself.

And his last day in London came, and still no answer from Violet. He had a letter from her in the mean time, certainly, but that was written before his telegram had reached her. He stayed indoors all day, hoping against hope that she might perhaps arrive without telegraphing. He started at every ring; ran down to the hall several times, thinking a passing cab was going to stop at the door, but the evening came, and nothing of any sort transpired.

Gradually he faced the fact that they would not meet again before he left. It was too late now, he would be starting in about an hour. And so this was the end of it all!

This was quite possibly the very last evening he should ever spend in the little home, from which he had expected so much; which had

realized his hopes and expectations so little—and he was spending it alone!

He sat gazing all round the little drawing-room, haunted by the memory of her presence, and reviewing the past months of his married life. But it was not a very satisfactory retrospect; there was little but disappointments to remember.

To shake himself free from his depressing thoughts, and try and turn them into a different channel, he at last got up from his seat, and took down a book from the bookcase above him.

It happened to be a volume of Clough's Poems, and it opened of its own accord at a certain place. Indeed, there was a mark in the place, and he turned at once to it. He could not have chosen a more unfortunate book for his present frame of feeling; for the mark was at the lines he had copied and sent to Violet at the end of their year of probation,

which had seemed to him so singularly appropriate. He read them sadly enough now.

"Rachel we serve for long years, that seem a few days only,
E'en for the love we have to her, and win her at last from Laban."

He continued reading, and as he did so his face assumed a sadder expression. He stretched out his hand for a pen, and scored some lines deeply, adding the day's date. Then he tore a bit of blotting-paper out of the blotting-book, blotted the page, and was about to restore the book to its place in the bookcase when he was interrupted by the entrance of his servant, with some question about his luggage.

He put down the book upon the table, and forgot all about it afterwards in the hurry of his departure. In a quarter of an hour he had started, and some twelve hours after that he was leaving Southampton in a troopship, amid a scene of the wildest enthusiasm, and a thunder of "God-speeds" from vast crowds assembled on the shore. He arrived at

Capetown in a little over a fortnight, and was at once sent up to the front.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Violet was not enjoying her trip as much as she had expected. To begin with, the Talbots were a very devoted couple, and with Mr. Talbot, as regards women, it was his wife first, and the rest—nowhere. Violet found herself not even a bad third, and did not enjoy the position at all. She soon began to miss the unselfish devotion to which Kenneth had accustomed her.

Travelling always shows up dispositions, and reveals faults and failings; and it did not take her long to discover that, devoted as Mr. Talbot was to Lady Fanny, it was a very different kind of devotion to that of Kenneth; and that he was a very selfish husband all the same. His wife must always like what *he* liked, do what *he* wished to do, want to see what *he* wanted to see.

To her own surprise she
rather home-sick, and she foun
often turning to Kenneth, an
home in London she had l
to get away from. Before ha
time for the tour had expir
willingly have foregone the re
Lady Fanny got the influenza
of the "lark" had been to come
maids, all the sick-nursing fell
and this did not amuse her at all.

Mr. Talbot was perfectly hel
besides being very much bored
he took it as a matter of cours
should give herself up to his s

business, and of course it was impossible for Violet to leave her friend alone. And when she was convalescent, Lady Fanny was still bent on doing the tour in Corsica, which had formed part of the programme, and to Corsica accordingly Violet had to go. Here, soon after their arrival, Violet got the influenza herself, and was laid up nearly a week. So the tour altogether was a fiasco.

The weather was wild and stormy, and communication cut off from the mainland, so for some time the two ladies got neither letters nor newspapers. When at last the mails came in, they learned for the first time all that had been going on in England since the outbreak of the war. As, however, neither of their husbands were in the Army, they were not vitally interested. Violet was puzzled and troubled at not hearing from Kenneth, for though the mails brought letters for Lady Fanny, there were none for her.

She became at last so anxious to get home, that as soon as she was well enough she persuaded Lady Fanny not to return to Rome, as she had intended, but to go back to England the shortest way. Then, and not till then, did she bethink herself of telegraphing to the hotel at Rome, to ask if by chance any letter had arrived for her, and to desire that, if so, it should be forwarded at once to Paris, which was to be their first stopping-place.

Her feelings may be imagined when, a day or two after her arrival in Paris, she received an envelope with a telegram enclosed; and opening it hastily, her dismayed eyes fell on the following words—"Have volunteered for South Africa, and been accepted. Come home at once if you wish to see me before I go." She turned to the date; the telegram was more than a fortnight old! Then and there she insisted on starting for London; but when they got to Calais, the weather was so bad that the

boat could not cross, and they were detained another couple of days. But at last they got across, and at about seven o'clock that evening Violet dashed up in a hansom to her own door.

The house had a suspiciously empty and shut-up appearance, and to her impatient peal at the bell there was no answer. She rang again and again. At last the door was opened a little way, and a little girl, who she recognized as the scullery-maid, peeped out. Seeing who it was, the girl opened it wider, and Violet, pushing impatiently past her, advanced into the hall, and saw all her last letters and telegrams to Kenneth lying unopened on the table! She summoned up all her self-control and all her dignity to hide her feelings, for she was nervously conscious of a look of disapproval on the little maid's face, and walked upstairs as if nothing had happened; but she had to bite her lips

fiercely to keep back the tears she felt stinging and smarting behind her eyelids.

She entered the drawing-room, and sank down into an armchair. "Gone! Gone to South Africa! Gone without a word of farewell!" Violet was stung to the quick. Not a word, not a line, not a "Good-bye!"

She had glanced eagerly all over the hall table; but there was nothing. She looked round the deserted little room with a sore pang in her heart. She recalled their cold little parting; the gravity and constraint of his manner, which she had heeded so little at the time.

And now he was gone! Gone, too, into danger! She might, perhaps, never see him again.

With a lump in her throat, Violet hastily rose from her seat, and began restlessly to walk up and down the room. As she passed the writing-table, an idea suddenly seized her that he might have written her a letter and

left it in the blotting-book. Eagerly she searched it through and through; but there was nothing. As she shut it up in despair, her eye lighted on a little book lying on the table with a piece of blotting-paper in it, as if put in for a mark.

She took up the book. It opened of its own accord at the place where the blotting-paper was. An unwonted feeling stirred in Violet's heart as her eye fell on the lines with the date by their side. For she remembered the date; she remembered the lines too. They had been in the one and only love-letter she had ever received from him. He must have been reading them lately, and thinking about her and the earlier days.

But there was another passage more freshly marked; for the deep scoring lines were imbibed by the blotting-paper, as was also another and more recent date.

It was the date of his departure! Feeling

almost as if she were going to receive a message from him, and know what he had been thinking about at the very last, she eagerly carried the book to the window, for the light was waning. And these were the lines she read—

"For this Rachel-and-Leah *is* Marriage: which, I have seen it.
One part heavenly-ideal, the other vulgar and earthly. . . .
Rachel we found as we fled from the daughters of Heth by the Desert.
Rachel we met at the Well; we came, we saw, we kissed her.
Rachel we serve for long years, that seem a few days only,
E'en for the love we have to her, and win her at last from Laban.
Is it not Rachel we take in our joy from the hand of her father?
Is it not Rachel we lead in the mystical veil from the Altar?—
Rachel we dream of at night? . . . *In the morning, behold it is Leah!*"

No more pathetic account of illusion and bitter disappointment could have been written. The thought of all that it implied smote upon Violet sharply; it went to her very heart.

The book dropped from between her fingers, and she buried her face in her hands.

CHAPTER IV

Colonel Montresor was sitting at breakfast next morning, when the door was thrown open, and Mrs. Kenneth Mackenzie was announced. Violet followed quick upon the servant, steeling herself against the disapproval in her uncle's face, and the undoubted coldness of his demeanour.

"Yes, I know all you are going to say," she said hastily; "but there was a mistake. I never got the telegram."

Her voice shook, and her whole appearance was so wretched that Colonel Montresor was mollified. The words of cutting reproach which were on his lips remained unspoken.

"You have been quite right from the first,

Uncle John," she went on quickly. "He was, as you said, miles too good for me. I was never the least worthy of him. But never mind about all that now. I want you to help me. I am going to Capetown as soon as I possibly can."

"What for?" was his rather surly answer. "You will only be in the way. Capetown is quite full enough. They don't want a pack of women out there, blocking up the hotels."

"Nevertheless, I am going," she said firmly. "Oh, Uncle John, don't talk and argue, but help me to carry out my intention. I don't quite know how to set about it, and—— What's that?"

It was shouting in the street below—men's voices shouting in rapid succession.

"Fresh news," said Colonel Montresor. "Another telegram from the War Office just come in, I suppose. A list of casualties is expected."

He hurried to the door, bought a paper, and together they read the list.

Yes, there was his name. Not killed—no, not so bad as that—but wounded ; wounded severely "while carrying a wounded comrade off the field under heavy fire."

"Splendid old fellow!" exclaimed Colonel Montresor, with tears of pride in his eyes. "He'll get the Victoria Cross!"

But Violet said nothing. She had quietly fainted away.

* * * * *

Colonel Montresor made no more objections to Violet's plans ; and in a short time she was on her way to Capetown. She had a dreadful passage ; and her sufferings in body were only equalled by her sufferings in mind. But at last she arrived. At last the terrible voyage was over! She arrived at Capetown. Yes ; but only to find that Kenneth was not there. He had been sent home with other sick and

[illegible] would follow. She must have passed him on the way? So there was nothing to be done but to wait[illegible] as soon as she could in a [illegible]-like manner, and begin the weary voyage all over again.

Sick at heart, and enfeebled in body, she arrived once more in England; a worn and weary being, in whom few would have recognised the bright and brilliant Mrs. Kenneth Mackenzie of a few months before.

[illegible] as if the love to meet the ship at Southampton was her [illegible].

"Is [illegible] come to me?"

She caught his arm nervously as he approached her, and her pleading, anxious eyes asked the question her lips refused to frame.

"All right, my dear," he said, very kindly, touched by her appearance and manner. "He is going on quite well. I have got him down at my house in the country."

* * * * *

And so it was in the old scenes of their love-making that the long-severed husband and wife met again. In the very room where they had parted on the eve of their year of probation, the wounded hero lay; and their farewell conversation rushed back upon Violet's memory as she entered; on his too, apparently, for he held out his arms to her with the old loving name.

"My Rachel!" he exclaimed.

"No, no!" she said, as she hid her face on his shoulder, and sobbed out her penitence, her remorse, her thankful joy at seeing him again. "Not that! I do not deserve it. You served, as you thought, for a Rachel, but I have been my own elder sister, and you had a Leah palmed off upon you instead."

* * * * *

They spent a few days of unalloyed happiness together before they referred to the subject again; but at the end of that time he asked

her what she had meant by what she had said on the evening of her arrival.

"I meant exactly what I said," she answered, sadly. "You idealized me, Kenneth. It was all, as Uncle John said at the time, illusion on your part; an illusion, alas! soon dispelled. Rachel stands for illusion; Leah, for disillusion and disappointment. You were as completely deceived as ever Jacob was, for you did not get the wife you served for. The worst of it is, you will have to content yourself with a Leah, since, unfortunately for yourself, you cannot get rid of me; for the Rachel you served for is for ever in the land of dreams and shadows. She always was, except in your idealizing imagination."

He laid his hand caressingly on hers.

"But if I say I did not idealize you," he said, gently; "if I say that it has *not* been illusion on my part, that I have got the Rachel I served for, and that she has proved herself

to be all, and more than I expected—what then ?"

"Then you will say what is not true," she answered ; "and what I *know* you do not really think. I have the proofs," she added in a lower tone.

"What do you mean ?" he asked.

She answered by fetching the little volume of Clough's poems, from which she never had parted ; and, handing it to him open at the marked passages, she walked away to the window.

"Where did you find this ?" he asked, in surprise.

She told him, still standing at the window, with her face turned away.

He seemed to her to be very long reading ; and she was conscious after a time that he took a pencil off the table near him, and was marking something else. At last he spoke.

"Violet," he said, "come here."

She advanced to the side of the sofa.

"I have cancelled what I marked last," he said.

"You cannot," she answered sadly.

"Yes, I can," he persisted, "for I have marked another passage which cancels the former one. It cancels all the past," he added in a low tone, as he handed the book to her with a loving smile.

And with her hand clasped in his she read—

"This Leah-and-Rachel *is* marriage . . . and Leah indeed is the elder.
Happy . . . is he who . . . adds to the elder the younger,
Not repudiates Leah; . . . but wins him the Rachel unto her."



THE LITTLE BROTHER-IN-CHARGE



THE LITTLE BROTHER-IN-CHARGE

It was Christmas Eve: foggy and dark this year in London, though brilliant frosty weather in the country.

Hieing along in the fog, with very red ears, and his little chapped hands thrust deep into his pockets to keep them warm, was a small boy of about eight years old, Joey by name.

In spite of the fog, and in spite of the cold, in spite, too, of his thin and rather ragged garments being insufficient to keep it really out, Joey looked very bright and happy.

For Joey had had a Christmas-box to-day from his Sunday school teacher. It was a penny, and it was now clasped tight in his

He was hurrying on to
ground Railway-station.
automatic sweet-machine, o
eyes had so often been fixed
if ever it would be his gc
a penny to put into the slo

And now he had got on
Christmas present for the
For his Sunday school teach
what he would like Santa C
if he could choose; and
without any hesitation—

"A penny to put into the
For often and often he



and girls putting penny after penny into the slot, and receiving as if by magic the little gift from the machine in return.

It had always seemed to Joey as if the machine must be alive, or else as if some kind person was hidden inside it. Indeed, he had a private opinion of his own, that it was no other than Santa Claus himself!

But no chance of getting one of his gifts had ever come Joey's way before. Pennies had not a knack of flowing into his pocket; or, if he ever did get one, he spent it on his little brothers and sisters, or took it home to his mother, who was a widow, and very, very poor, and had a large family of small children to keep, of whom he himself was the eldest.

For Joey was one of those little boys we so often see in the streets of London, wheeling a perambulator with a baby in it, and two or three small children walking by the side, all of whom are in the elder brother's care.

Wonderfully kind and patient they are, some of them; all honour to the little fellows, whose patience must be often sorely tried.

Gentle, too, and careful, according to their lights (albeit the perambulator *does* go from road to curbstone and from curbstone to road with a jerk which must be a terrible jar to the spine of its poor little occupant), for if the baby is fretful and discontented, you may often see the little brother-in-charge doing all in his power to soothe it, without the slightest trace of irritation or impatience.

He will lift it tenderly out of the carriage, of which it is perhaps weary, or where it is perhaps very cold, and stagger along with it in his arms, with difficulty pushing the empty perambulator along with his disengaged hand; beguiling the crying child as he does so with scraps of conversation and soothing words to turn its mind from its troubles, directing its attention to various objects of interest

passing by in the streets, or to attractive objects in the shop windows.

And with great success, as a rule. The infant brother or sister seems thoroughly to appreciate the attentions lavished upon it, and also to enjoy the change of position ; which is more surprising, since to the passer-by the baby looks anything but comfortable, suggesting the idea that in leaving the carriage for its present quarters it has only gone "out of the frying-pan into the fire."

Such a little brother-in-charge, then, was Joey ; and, in an ordinary way, he would have scrupled to keep any penny he might get for himself; for, in his eyes, Billy and Kitty and Jack and Baby all came before himself.

But in this instance there was no possible scruple about it. For his teacher, who was fond of little Joey, and knew what a good, unselfish little boy he was, had expressly said, "Now, Joey, this is for you, your own

Christmas present, to put into the slot!" This was how it came to pass that Joey was running as fast as he could to the Underground Railway-station to obey her welcome command.

Driving along the street at the same moment in a warm, snug little brougham, by his mother's side, and with a fur rug over his knees, was another little boy, quite three years younger than Joey. He, too, had just received his Christmas present. He, too, had got it tight in his hand. But his hands were not chapped and chilblained like Joey's ; and they were encased in neat little dog-skin gloves. Moreover, his Christmas-box was not a penny, but a half-sovereign. He had just been to pay his grandmother a Christmas Eve visit, and this had been her present to him.

The only point in which Eddie and Joey were alike was their intense joy and childish delight in their Christmas presents.

Now Joey, in his hurry, heedlessly crossing

the road without looking round, never noticed this carriage coming round the corner. The coachman shouted loudly to him, and had to pull the horses up suddenly to prevent their knocking him down. But such things had often happened to Joey before. He was a reckless crosser of streets when alone, and he only ran just a little faster than he had been doing, and reached the curbstone on the other side in safety. His pulses did not even beat quicker for the occurrence; so little did it alarm him, so unmoved was he by this little *contretemps*.

Not so, however, the lady in the carriage—Eddie's mother. She put her head out of the window and called to the coachman to stop.

The footman got down from the box, and went to the door to see what was the matter.

"I am going to get out," said the lady. "Open the door and lift out Master Edward. Do you know, Simpson," she said, going up

to the coachman, and speaking quickly, and a little indignantly, "that you nearly ran over a *child?*"

The poor coachman apologized, and assured his mistress it really was not his fault. The fog was so thick, he could hardly see his way, and the child had come out of the darkness, and run across the road right under the horses' heads, before he had realized there was any one there.

"Well, I shall not drive any more to-day," said the lady. "You can take the carriage home. The fog is getting thicker, and I shall go home by the Underground Railway. We are not far from one of the stations, are we?"

"Quite close, my lady," said the coachman. "It is only a few yards further on. John knows the way, and could show it to you."

"Very well," said his mistress. "Then that is what I shall do. Come along, Eddie, darling. You and I will go home by the



Underground Railway. It is much the best place in the fog."

Eddie had been lifted out of the carriage, and was now standing by her side. He was dressed almost like a little Russian, in his mother's desire to keep him warm. But for all that, his ears were as red as Joey's, as they peeped out under his fur cap.

He took his mother's hand, and they made their way to the station, preceded by the footman to show them the way, which was necessary, as it was getting darker and darker every moment. He took their tickets, and brought them to his mistress.

"You had better go back with the carriage, John," she said. "Simpson may want some help with the horses, if the fog gets much worse."

The footman touched his hat, and disappeared, and Eddie and his mother descended to the platform below.

"Our train is the Inner Circle train," she said, "and there will not be another for nearly ten minutes; so we shall have a little while to wait. We will walk up and down to keep ourselves warm. You have got grandmamma's present quite safe, haven't you, Eddie?"

"Oh yes, mother," was the answer.

"Don't you think you had better give it to me to put into my purse, now that we have got out of the carriage? You might lose it."

"Oh, I shan't lose it," said the little boy. "I have got it tight, tight, quite tight in my glove, and my hand shut over it. A half-sovereign—a whole half-sovereign!" he added exultingly. "I have never had so much money in all my life before, have I, mother?"

"No, never. And *I* think it rather too much for a little boy like you to have all at once. It is too much to waste."

"Oh, I shan't *waste* it!" exclaimed Eddie.

"There are lots and lots of useful nice things I am going to buy with it."

"What things are they?" asked his mother, smiling.

"Oh well," said Eddie, vaguely, "I can't just now remember their names; but I know there are hundreds of things I've been wanting dreadfully badly for such a long, long time. And now I shall be able to buy them *all*. How many shillings are there in a half-sovereign, mother?"

"Ten," she answered.

"Are there really?" said Eddie, much struck. His half-sovereign became a great deal more valuable in his eyes than it had been a minute before.

"And how many pennies, mother?"

"A hundred and twenty," was the reply.

"*A hundred and twenty!*" he repeated, in an awe-struck tone. "Oh, *what* a lot! I wonder——"

But what Eddie wondered will never be known, for just then his attention was entirely distracted from what he was saying by coming in sight of an automatic sweet machine.

It was not a familiar sight to Eddie, as it was to Joey, and for that reason was perhaps, if possible, even more fascinating.

He listened with the most eager attention while his mother explained to him the working of the machine; how you first pushed back the drawer, then put the penny in the slot, and then pulled out the drawer, and found the sweet lying there, ready for you to take.

Eddie was completely enthralled, and was of course filled with the most ardent desire to try his own hand at it.

"Oh, mother," he exclaimed, "*do* give me a penny to put in!"

"I am afraid I have not got such a thing," she answered, "but I will see."



And she put her hand into her pocket to get out her purse.

Just at this moment Joey arrived at the automatic machine, rather breathless from his long run. Seeing a lady and a little boy in possession, he waited till they should move on.

Eddie's mother opened her purse.

"No, dear," she said; "I am sorry, but I have not got one."

"Oh dear!" said Eddie, almost crying with disappointment. "Are you quite, *quite* sure, mother? Do look again."

"I am quite sure, dear," she rejoined. "And, indeed, I was pretty sure I had not when you first asked me."

"Have you got half a crown?" he asked. "I think that would do as well as a penny."

"No, Eddie, I have nothing but a sovereign in my purse."

"And a sovereign is too small," sighed Eddie. "Oh dear, what a bother!"

"I am very sorry, darling," said his mother; "but I am afraid there is no help for it. You must come another day and bring a penny with you."

But this was no consolation to Eddie; he wanted the penny now.

"Couldn't we get the sovereign changed, mother?" he said eagerly.

"Hardly here, I think," she said, looking round at the paper-stall, which was a small one, and where stood one solitary little boy, selling papers.

"But let's *try*, mother."

But the paper boy, as Eddie's mother had expected, could not change a sovereign, nor a half-sovereign.

If it had been a shilling he could have obliged them, or even half a crown; but he had not enough change for gold. He turned over with his hand, as he spoke, a little heap of copper, at which Eddie gazed enviously.



"All those pennies," he said, in a melancholy voice, "and *I* can't get one! *How* I wish grandmamma had given me a penny!"

"What, instead of a half-sovereign, Eddie?" said his mother, laughing. "You *are* a silly, ungrateful little boy. Why, you have got a hundred and twenty pennies in your half-sovereign. Have you forgotten that?"

"What's the good of having a hundred and twenty in it, if I can't get *one* out?" wailed Eddie; and he dropped behind his mother, partly because he was a little ashamed she should see he was crying, and partly because he could not tear himself away from the automatic machine.

Joey, meanwhile, had taken advantage of the lady and her little boy moving away to the paper-stall to advance to the machine. He was in the act of pushing back the drawer, and in another moment the penny

would have rattled into the slot, when the sound of crying smote upon his ear.

It was a sound that never failed to attract the attention of the little brother-in-charge, familiar as he was with it. Almost mechanically he drew back his hand, and looked round. Now, Joey was no respecter of persons. It mattered little to him that the child from whom the sounds proceeded was well dressed, and apparently well-to-do. Perhaps the fog was too thick for him to see any difference. All he saw was that the little boy was younger than he, about the age and size of his own little brother Jack, who, being the invalid of the family, was the especial object of Joey's care and tenderness. He had curls, too, like Jack, and—he was crying. That was quite enough for Joey. Besides, he knew why he was crying. He had been an attentive and interested listener to the conversation between the little boy and his mother.



He drew a little nearer to Eddie.

"Couldn't yer get ne'er a one?" he asked, and his voice had a sympathetic tone in it which had a disastrous effect upon Eddie.

For on hearing his pitiful case thus put into words, he was completely overcome. His fate seemed to him even harder and more full of pathos than it had done before.

"No, not one!" he answered, and his tears burst out afresh.

Then the tender feelings of the little brother-in-charge went out to the weeping child. He was so accustomed to the office of Consoler; it was second nature to him to try and check falling tears. He paused for just a moment, and then held out his little chapped hand.

"Yer can 'ave mine," he said.

The penny, warm from the long close clasp of his chilblained fingers, lay in his outstretched palm—the only warm thing about him, except his little brotherly heart.

"Yer can 'ave it," he repeated, as Eddie hesitated.

For Eddie was struck dumb, and wholly taken aback by the magnitude of the offer. He, better than any one, could appreciate at its true value the stupendous nature of the sacrifice.

No wonder he hesitated to avail himself of it. There was no time to consult his mother. She was now some little way off. He must act for himself and on his own judgment for the first time in his life, and quickly, too, for the in-coming train now loomed through the fog; its lights were already glistening through the darkness.

One moment he paused; the next he drew his half-sovereign out of his glove, and handed it to Joey.

"We'll *change*," he said eagerly, "and then it will be quite fair. There are a hundred and twenty pennies in there," he added, as if in exculpation.



As he said the word and, Esau-like, sacrificed the future to the present, there floated through his mind for a moment a regretful recollection of all he had meant to buy with it: all the hundreds of things he had been wanting so dreadfully badly for such a long, long time, and which now, by his own act, were for ever relegated to the Land of Dreams and Shadows where they had had their being.

Joey took what was handed to him mechanically. He did not see what it was. He was not thinking about it. He hardly heard what Eddie said. His thoughts and his eyes were following his precious penny as he transferred it to other hands. The expression of his face told its own tale. It was a sacrifice, willing indeed and self-made, but still a sacrifice.

And Eddie, whose own tears of disappointment were hardly dry—Eddie saw and understood.

"We'll do it together," he said eagerly.

"We'll both drop it into the slot at once. Come on!"

And then the little chapped hand and the well-gloved one met together in a firm clasp, the penny linking them together.

Eagerly Joey, who knew most about it, pushed back the drawer. The united hands, trembling with excitement, guided the penny to the slot, left go of it at the same moment, and it rattled slowly down—down—down.

The two children looked at each other, and their eyes met in a glance of sympathetic delight.

"Now!" exclaimed Eddie; and they pulled the drawer open with eager, anxious fingers.

There lay the mysterious little gift of toffee in its silver casing! And both gazed with rapture at a realized dream.

Then Eddie, moved by a sudden impulse, sacrificed himself in his turn.



"*You* can have it," he said; but he gave a little sigh as he spoke.

"Be quick, dear," said his mother's voice at his side. "This is our train. I had lost sight of you. What have you been about?"

* * * * *

The Inner Circle train loomed darkly out as it had loomed darkly in, and Eddie and his mother were swept away with it. It left the station more gloomy than ever, by reason of the smoke it had brought with it, and which found no means of escape.

But it left *one* very bright thing behind it. It was the face of little Joey, on which the gas-lamp, underneath which he stood, was shining. It revealed him standing there, with the silver-cased toffee in one hand, gazing with wide-open, sparkling eyes at something which lay in the open palm of the other.

Heaven knows what thoughts were floating through the mind of the child, what infinite

possibilities were opening out before him, as he realized the astounding fact that he held in his hand a bit of gold, and that that bit of gold was his very, very own !

Who shall say what golden dreams and visions were rising round him ? If Eddie knew of hundreds, Joey knew of thousands unobtained, and hitherto unobtainable, blessings which this little magic circle would bring within his reach. Boundless to him were the limits of its powers ! Life looked quite different through its shining medium, and to Joey no doubt at that moment " All things were possible ! "

The almost dazzling brightness of his eyes, the radiance of his whole countenance, lit up as it was by the flare of the gas-jet, stood out against the gloom and the fog by which he was surrounded, and seemed to bring before one for a moment the thought of the illumination of the Christ-child in the sacred pictures,

and the nimbus round the heads of saints standing out against the darkness of the painter's background.

A fanciful thought, no doubt. Little Joey was no saint, I know. He was only a kind, unselfish little brother—a tender-hearted, compassionate child. Moreover, his most definite thought at the moment was a *very* material one; for it was only what a grand Christmas-dinner Billy, and Kitty, and Jack, and Baby should have!

Nevertheless, he had the Christ-spirit, and, as I think of him, the words come into my mind, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

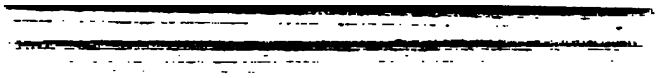
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"No, darling," said Eddie's mother, very softly, in answer to the somewhat anxious inquiry with which he ended his simple account of what had taken place. "No; I don't think grandmamma will mind!"





LISTENING FACES



LISTENING FACES

CHAPTER I

No one could have helped noticing them as they filed into church, those five little fair-haired children. They were so very pretty, and all so exactly alike!

A tall young father brought up the rear, and shut the pew door behind him with a snap —an operation which was quite unnecessary, as the pew was now quite full, and a tight fit, too. He was as fair as his children, and very good looking; but he had a weary, careworn look on his face, as if somewhat weighed down by his large young family, as no doubt he was.

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none of the material is wasted, for every bit is made to "come in."

In impecunious households there is no scope for individual taste, nor for such trifling considerations as which colour suits this or that child best. Everything, maternal vanity included, must give way to economy; and if one child has to wear a colour which particularly misbecomes him or her—well, it cannot be helped.

However, in the case of the little family under our notice, there was no drawback of this kind, for hair and complexions being exactly alike, the same colour admirably suited each one, and a lovelier little group, clad in a rather pale blue serge, it would have been hard to find.

The truth was they would have looked well in anything, even in the proverbial "hop-sack," which, by the way, used to be a term of opprobrium, but is now a somewhat fashionable

material, so that the point of the remark is rather lost.

There was another thing to be noticed about this family. Poorly clad as the children were, there was an unmistakable air of refinement about them. They "might have been anybody," as the saying is. Their poverty, therefore, was of that kind that is more trying, and in some ways sadder, than any —the poverty which has to keep up an appearance. This was, perhaps, the explanation of the peculiar expression on the young father's face.

The congregation was gradually assembling, and the little group in the pew took, after the fashion of country children, the greatest interest in each arrival, all being probably well known to them. But their chief interest seemed to be centred in the large pew in the front of the gallery ; the curling eyelashes were constantly raised to it with eager curiosity, but as yet



there was nothing there to satisfy it, for the pew was empty.

I must own that it was not only the fair-haired children whose looks were directed that way. There appeared to be what I can only describe as a "flutter" in the congregation, a suppressed excitement concerning the expected occupants of that big pew.

The facts are these. The present owners of Sedgwick Park have only lately come into their inheritance, and this is their first appearance in the village church. The last lord, an old bachelor, who had lived all his life there, had died about six months before, but he had left the house in such a neglected condition that there needed much doing to it before it was fit for habitation. Alterations and improvements had been going on ever since; and though the new Lord Sedgwick and his wife had been backwards and forwards a good deal, they had as yet only stayed a day or two at a

time, and had been but little seen in the village. They had practically only arrived for good a few days ago, and this is their first Sunday since they have settled. Hence the excitement among the congregation generally, to whom they are strangers.

At last the crisis came. The wheels of a carriage were heard driving rapidly up outside the church, the congregation all, as it were, sprang to attention, and many eyes were surreptitiously raised to the gallery above them.

After a short pause a good-looking young couple entered, and took their seats. They were not exactly what would be called a "young married couple," for the husband looked about the age of the father in the pew below, and his wife only a few years younger. She was decidedly handsome, but her face wore a discontented expression, which somewhat marred its beauty. In fact, its weary, careworn



look was a reflection of that of the father of the five children in the pew below, though it could not possibly have been for the same reasons.

The service at once began. The pretty children ceased to look about them. They found their places in their prayer-books, the elder ones sharing their books with the younger. Those who were old enough raised their pretty childish voices in "psalms, and hymns, and songs of praise." The least attentive in the pew was the one who ought to have showed an example.

The pre-occupied air of the father during the service was quite a contrast to the attentive little faces at his side. His thoughts were evidently far away. Was he thinking of the weekly books which would confront him on the morrow, and of the many hungry little mouths he had to feed? Poor man! no doubt he was. The last hymn before the sermon was

one on almsgiving, betokening that a charity sermon was about to follow. A slightly sarcastic look wreathed itself round his mouth, and he compressed his lips firmly.

The preacher was a stranger. He had come down from London to plead his own cause in a new place; one of those men who tear at one's heart-strings by their accounts of the district they have come from. It may be East London, or North London, or South London —it matters little, the tale is the same: seventeen to twenty thousand souls (and bodies) in their care, an entire lack of rich in their parish, and a very limited stipend of their own. "So much to do, so little done," and nothing to do it with, would sum up any of their cases.

Very pathetic, very harrowing, and, to the listener, very hopeless is the picture they put before him. And yet these men are always optimists! All honour to them that they



should be so. It speaks volumes for their faith and trust, and for that hopefulness which *is* faith! So great is it that they almost, before they have done, inspire it in their hearers.

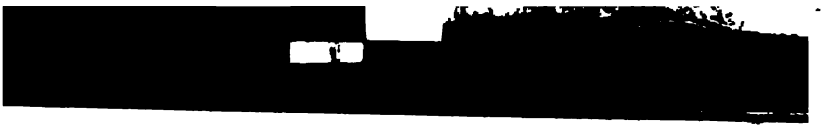
Is it the individual cases that come under their notice that bear them up? It must be so; otherwise surely they would sink under the difficulties, the disappointments, and, above all, the *indifference* they meet with as they toil. But it is the armchair philosopher who is pessimistic—the man who reads and talks about the poor population—not the man who lives and works among them.

The sermon is very simple and intensely *real*. Facts, and not theories, he puts before his hearers, and the congregation is quiet and attentive. All the five children are listening, each with a different expression on his or her pretty uplifted face. Even the youngest of the little boys in the pew hears of something suited

to his comprehension, and is interested in the account of the poor little children in London, so far less well off than himself.

The old rector never preached in this way, so it is little wonder that the little fellow listened with interest, for it was a style of discourse to which in the old village church he was quite unaccustomed. Besides, the preacher talked of such places as Shoreditch, and Stepney, and Bow, all pleasantly associated in his mind with nursery rhymes and Christmas games. There is a feeling of pride in his little mind at recognizing the names, mingled with a sensation of hardly defined surprise that such places should be mentioned in church.

Floating about in his head, too, are the familiar rhymes, and he is trying to prevent his memory recurring to them when—yes! the preacher himself quoted the very lines! The child's rosy lips parted as the words fell upon his ear.



Shoreditch, said the preacher, was associated in their minds with the word "rich."

"'When I grow rich,'
Say the bells of Shoreditch."

A bright flush of delight illumined the little boy's face. Never in his life had he recognized a quotation in a sermon before. It was altogether a novel sensation. The pride of being familiar with one was very great, and was shared by all the other children, for an electric thrill passed down the pew. The little fellow himself was, however, too discreet to glance at his brothers and sisters. Perhaps he was afraid that their pride and surprise might be mingled with another feeling! He sat quite still, and did not move his head in their direction. Besides, he was listening too breathlessly to want to stir, for he was debating in his own mind whether it was possible the clergyman would go on right to the end of the quotation. For all he knew he might

not stop short of . . . ! But that seemed hardly possible.

No, the preacher did not finish the verse. He stopped at "Shoreditch," and proceeded to show what a misnomer the word which rhymed with that place would be as applied thereto. And then he launched into a piteous and harrowing description of the state of things as they existed there at that moment. He spoke of the over-crowded houses "packed from cellar to garret with the poorest of the poor;" of the wretched starving boys and girls going to school without any breakfast; of the babies who could hardly toddle looking after themselves in the streets while their mothers were away at work; of shivering children in winter with hardly rags to cover them and no fire to warm them; of the same children in the heat of summer playing in the gutters of the narrow streets with the blazing sun beating down on their uncovered



heads. And then, with a quick transition, he painted the contrast between their condition and that of the well-to-do congregation by whom he was surrounded, and he dwelt forcibly and feelingly on the inequality of the distribution of the good things of this life.

Grown-up people when listening to a sermon are often very busy fitting the cap on to their friends and neighbours. But children are too honest to do this; they fit the cap on to themselves. You can see by the expression in the eyes of the little fellow we have been watching that he feels half ashamed of being in such much better circumstances than the little boys in Shoreditch. He almost looks as if he felt it was his fault, and that he was being blamed for it. And yet he has not a shilling of his own in the world, and a patch in his blue serge elbow!

A very prosperous-looking farmer's wife in the next pew, with well-dressed (if not over-dressed) daughters on each side of her, is quite

unmoved and unconcerned by the contrast drawn by the preacher. You feel she has all, and more, than she wants, both for herself and her children—enough and to spare. But *she* apparently does not feel any sense of the "unfitness of things" in the fact that she and hers should have abundance, and the poor mothers and children in East London nothing at all.

Lady Sedgwick's eyes, wandering round the church with that dull, dissatisfied look in them, suddenly lighted on the pew full of pretty children, each with his or her uplifted face to the pulpit, and her glance was arrested.

There is no prettier sight than children's listening faces, when an appeal is being made to their hearts and consciences. Every feeling is reflected as it passes through their little minds. Interest, surprise, sympathy, distress, conviction, is painted upon them in turn. If the arrow shot at a venture hits the white, you see it in their faces in a moment. By the



heightening colour, by the parting of the lips, by the deepening expression in the eyes, by the momentary droop of the eyelashes, you can tell when the tender little conscience is stricken, and when the shaft goes home.

Lady Sedgwick's glance travelled on from one pretty little face to the other, till it rested at last on that of the eldest girl at the top of the pew. She was the only one who had not got blue eyes. They were a lovely shade of hazel; large liquid eyes full of expression, and wearing at the moment that Lady Sedgwick's fell upon her a look of pathetic understanding and sympathy, as something she was hearing seemed to strike and especially appeal to her. Lady Sedgwick's eyes did not wander again. Fascinated by the children's beauty, and further fascinated by the expression of absorbed interest on each little countenance, she kept her gaze fixed upon them.

The sermon ended with an earnest appeal for

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only, produced a coin from the depths of his pocket. This seemed to represent all the family wealth. They seemed anxious, and a message was passed along the pew to the eldest girl at the end. By their signs one gathered that the question was, Should an application be made to their father? The girl with the hazel eyes looked timidly and doubtfully at him, scanning his face as he sat with his arms crossed in front of him, making no movement to put his hand into his pocket. It did not look propitious. Her brows contracted with anxiety. If he was not going to give anything himself, her speaking glance at her brothers and sisters seemed to say, he was not likely to give anything to them to contribute. But it was evident the younger ones wished her to make the appeal, as being the one most likely to have the request attended to. They urged her by signs and frowns to do so. She acquiesced at last, and with a slight blush mantling

her cheek, she leaned across the rest, who all drew back, flattening their little figures against the back of the pew, to enable her to reach him, and touched him gently on the arm.

He bent his head towards her, and she whispered something in his ear. You could see by her deepening blush that she had been refused. She drew back quickly, and shook her head sadly to the others. Deep depression now reigned in the pew, and the plate was approaching!

It was handed first to the father, who shook his head rather aggressively with something of a bitter smile upon his face. It was then handed to each little child in turn (which struck one as rather cruel of the churchwarden), and each child in turn shook his or her head; but sadly, not aggressively, except the happy possessor of the coin. The look in the hazel eyes of the eldest girl as she met those of the

churchwarden seemed to say, "Oh, how I wish I could! but I can't."

The collection came to an end, the blessing was pronounced, and the congregation began to disperse. Lady Sedgwick leaned over the gallery to see the last of the children as they filed out of the pew one by one. She rather hurried down the stairs, for she was anxious to get a closer look at them, and hoped to meet the little party outside the church. But it was some way round from the gallery door to the church porch, and by the time she reached it there was nothing to be seen of them but their receding figures in the distance as they walked along the high-road all in a row; five little vanishing pale-blue backs, with a patch of gold on each.

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glade they were passing, where the deer were in a group. "Little fawns?"

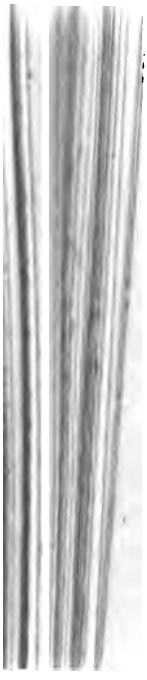
"Oh, Raymond, those lovely children in church! Didn't you see them?"

"I think I did see some rather pretty children in one of the pews."

"Rather pretty!" she exclaimed. "They were more like angels than anything else."

Her manner was fervent. She broke off suddenly, and her eyes filled with tears.

Lady Sedgwick had married the man of her choice; she had everything this world can give, everything in her life to satisfy her and make her happy—save one: she had no children. This was the grief of her life, and she never got reconciled to it. She had been married over five years, but the disappointment was as fresh as ever. It lay heavy upon her heart, and it rankled there. It marred all her life and all her happiness. She allowed it to do so, and made no effort to throw off the



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She thought he must feel it now more than he had done, for as a rule men think more about heirs than women ; but she could not detect any fresh regrets in him. She wondered at it ; for she felt that all he was doing and planning to do in the place—the improvements, the alterations, the planting—with no one to hand it all down to, must be so very unsatisfactory. In short, she had said something of the sort to him only that morning. "Some one will enjoy it, I dare say," had been his answer, and she had said no more.

If the truth were told, her fits of gloom and depression distressed him more than their cause ; and he often affected not to share her regrets from a desire to ward off the subject. He had noted her absorption in the children in church with a feeling of misgiving. He was afraid, by the expression of her face as they walked along the Park on their way home, that the sight of them had renewed some of her

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For sharing it with the woman he loved made it to him doubly valuable.

So at this moment whose it would be after them did not seem to matter very much. It was too new a sensation to be master in the present, to "bother himself" about who would be master in the future. The end of life, which would alone raise the question, seemed a long way off. Life stretched long and pleasantly before him.

He walked on slightly in front of her, now stepping aside to mark a tree in an overgrown plantation; now grubbing with his stick among shrubs, absorbed in his occupation.

"It wants thinning here dreadfully."

"Wants thinning—yes."

"The great thing now will be to have the place better kept. The walks and drives have been shamefully neglected."

"Well kept—yes."

"Eh? Yes! I am glad you agree with me

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referred to this conversation only the evening before, and she, being at the moment absorbed in the regretful thoughts which had so taken hold upon her since her arrival at Sedgwick, had not taken the subject up much, and he had in consequence dropped it.

Now, however, as they neared the spot, the conversation recurred to her memory very forcibly, and, rather remorseful at having been so little sympathetic the night before, she at once alluded to it, thinking how pleased he would be to hear how accurately she remembered it. But now *his* head was full—for the moment—of something else; for he was revolving in his mind a suitable place for rearing young pheasants, and had fixed on this very place as a convenient one for his purpose. So that, when they reached the spot, it was more suggestive to him of his new project than of the more remote association. He did not take up the subject with the interest she had expected.

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be somewhat different! If she is thinking at all about the sermon she has just heard, she must surely be comparing her own lot with that of the wretched people she has been hearing about. The contrast is so sharp. As she gazes on the fair scene spreading before her, and drinks in its beauty, her thoughts *must* be dwelling a little on the "inequalities of the distribution of the good things of this life," as suggested by the picture so lately and so powerfully drawn of the crowded and poverty-stricken parish in London.

They are. But hardly in the way the preacher had intended. "Unequal distribution of the good things of this life," that man had said just now. Yes, indeed, when the owner of that pew had those five lovely children in his home, and she and her husband not one!

> "Each thinks his own the bitt'rest trial given,
> Each wonders at the sorrow of his lot,
> His neighbour's sufferings presently forgot."

What darlings they were! And how pretty the expression of absorbed interest on their little listening faces!

The sermon had apparently been so very interesting, and so very touching!

But she had not been touched or interested herself. Indeed, she had not been listening very much until her eyes had fallen upon the pew. No, it is not the sermon that has impressed her, but its effect upon the children, whose innocent speaking faces had betrayed the feelings to which it had given rise in their tender little hearts.

Raymond, she reflected, had not apparently been touched or interested either, for he had not alluded to it since, and had been absorbed in his plantations immediately afterwards. Why did the children care so much, when she and her husband cared so little?

How tender-hearted children were! How responsive to an appeal to their feelings!

How full of sympathy and loving-kindness! Why had she and her husband been denied this softening influence in their lives? her rebellious heart cried out. What a much better woman she would have been if she had children of her own! She knew she was selfish, she knew she was spoilt; but then she had not, and never had had, any one but herself to think of. Raymond was so utterly unselfish, so devoted to her, that he did not count. Indeed, he made her worse.

How motherhood drew women out!—drew out all the best in them. She could recall in her own experience, among her friends, more than one selfish, pleasure-seeking girl, who, when she had met her later in life as wife and mother, was an altogether different person. Her very countenance was changed; her eyes had a new expression; her life was merged in that of her children, and her selfishness was gone for ever.

So, too, might she have been a different woman if children had not been denied her. "It's not my fault," she said, half out loud. But above these rebellious thoughts rose once more the memory of the pretty listening faces; and by that curious law of association, as her thoughts dwelt on them, portions of the sermon began to recur to her, though she had not been conscious of listening at the time.

"Houses packed from garret to cellar with the poorest of the poor; wretched starving boys and girls going to school without any breakfast. . . ."

The voice of the preacher sounded on her ear again—the earnest appeal for help with which he ended his sermon, his assurance that no contribution, however small, no gift, however trifling, but would be of service where it would go to.

And what had she done to help him?



Nothing! And then her thoughts went back to the children—to the recollection of the depression that had reigned in the pew when the plate was handed to them, and they had nothing to put into it.

That indeed was a sermon in itself! Those mournful little faces, those sad little shakes of the head—what an example to their cold-hearted elders! Poor little tender-hearted things! How she wished she could have given them money to contribute, and spared them their distress and disappointment!

It had cost her nothing to shake her head when the plate was handed to her. She had not expected an offertory; she had not brought her purse with her, and there was an end of it. Not that, even that, was an excuse, for she could easily have borrowed some money of her husband.

But it was not only that she had given nothing, but that she had not felt the smallest

regret or compunction at not being able to do so.

And again the question rose: "Why did the children care so much, when she had cared so little?"

This time there was no laying the blame on circumstances, no making of false excuses.

"Because of the hardness of your heart," she murmured; and a lump came into her throat.

"Wretched starving boys and girls going to school without any breakfast."

That *ought* to have appealed to her. But she had done nothing to help them. She, whose lifelong lament was that she had no children of her own, had had no feeling for the children of others.

If she had felt no compunction at the time, she began to feel it now.

The view at which she was gazing was blurred and dim, for her eyes were blinded by



sudden tears. She dashed them impatiently away.

"Feeling that does not pass into action is mere sentiment," she said to herself; "and it is too late to do anything now."

Then suddenly an idea flashed across her mind, and she rose hastily from her seat by the window. No, it was *not* too late. She might do something still! There would still be time to send a contribution before the strange clergyman left the village. He was probably staying at the Rectory till to-morrow. Feeling could still pass into action, and it *should*, "for those darlings' sakes."

She went to her bureau, and took out her cheque-book.

"Sunday, of course," she murmured, as she sat down and took up a pen. "Never mind, I must ante-date it."

She paused a moment, and then put the cheque-book back. No, she would not write

a cheque. She did not wish her name to appear. She had a fanciful feeling it should be the children's gift, "as, indeed, it most certainly is," she added to herself; and she wanted the contribution to be added to the offertory, as if it had been put in by some one in church.

She opened another drawer, from which she took some banknotes. There were several.

She took them out, counted them, and put first one and then two into an envelope. On second thoughts she added another, and finally they *all* found their way into the envelope, with a letter to the rector, saying she hoped they might be in time to be added anonymously to the morning collection. She took it downstairs herself into the drawing-room, and rang the bell.

"I want this taken down to the Rectory at once," she said to the servant who answered



the bell, "and delivered into the rector's own hands. At once, mind."

Nor was this all.

"Raymond," she said at luncheon, "I want you to give an annual subscription to that poor parish in London we heard about in church to-day."

"Very well, dear," was the prompt reply. "How much would you like me to give?"

She mentioned a sum, rather a large one, and he made a note of it, saying he would write a cheque to-morrow. But when he brought it to her the next morning, she saw he had filled in the cheque for double the amount she had named. She looked up at him with a bright, grateful smile.

"In memory of our first Sunday together in our beautiful new home," he said, as he bent down and kissed her.

* * * * *

And so, after all, the little fair-haired children

need not have been so distressed because they could do nothing for the over-worked London clergyman and his poor populous parish. They had been instrumental in doing more for him than in their wildest dreams they could ever have imagined possible. With them "high failure had overleaped the bounds of low success." For if their little listening faces had not expressed such absorbing interest and sympathy, if they had not shaken their little heads so sadly when the plate was handed to them, Lady Sedgwick's banknotes would never have found their way into the collection, nor would Lord Sedgwick's large annual subscription have followed.

The London clergyman was astonished at the results of his sermon. He had never, he assured the old rector, expected such an offertory from a village congregation.

And as to the annual subscription that reached him before he left the next day—why,



it would be his sheet-anchor in many a dark day to come!

He went back to his work with a light heart and renewed hope and courage.

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